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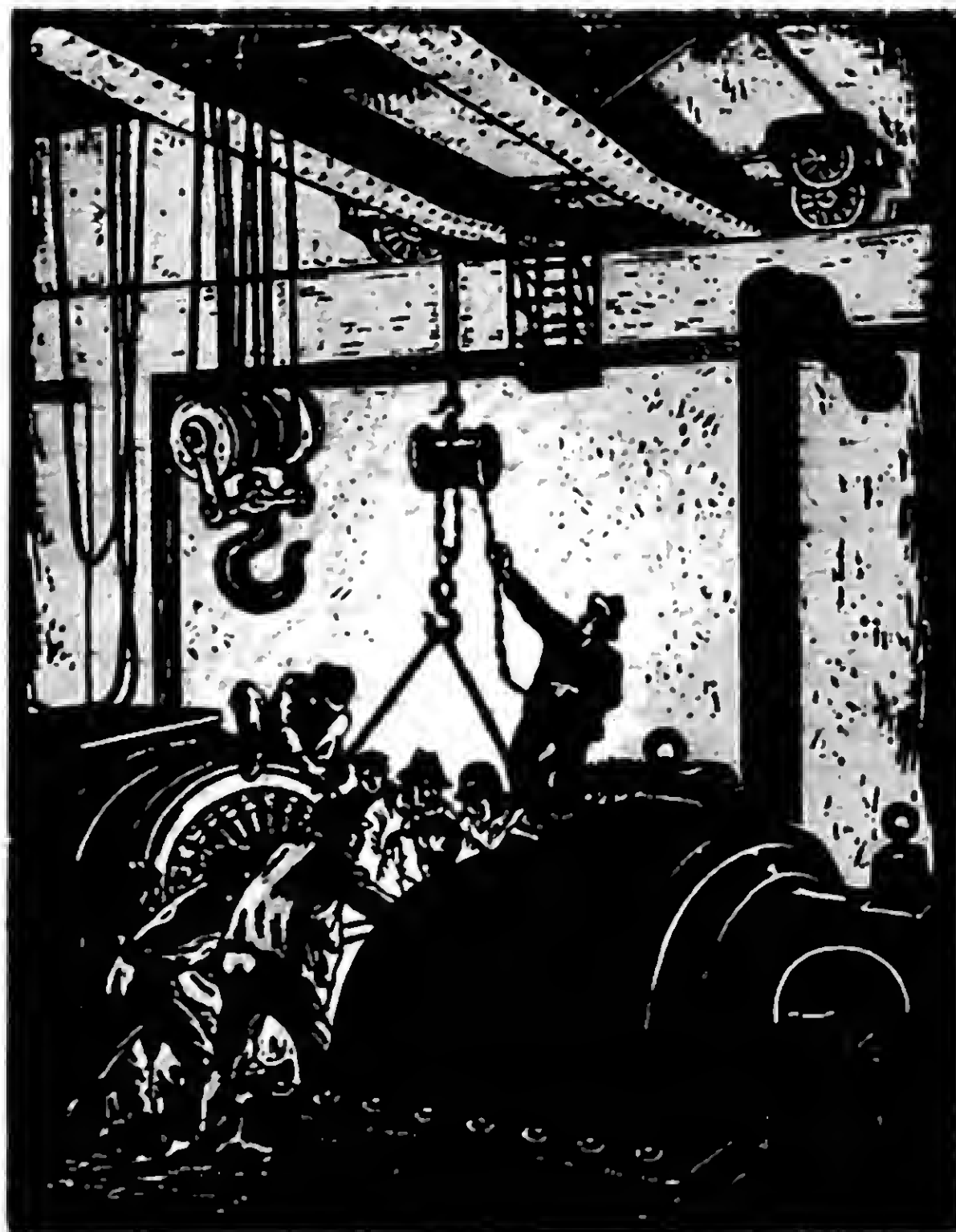
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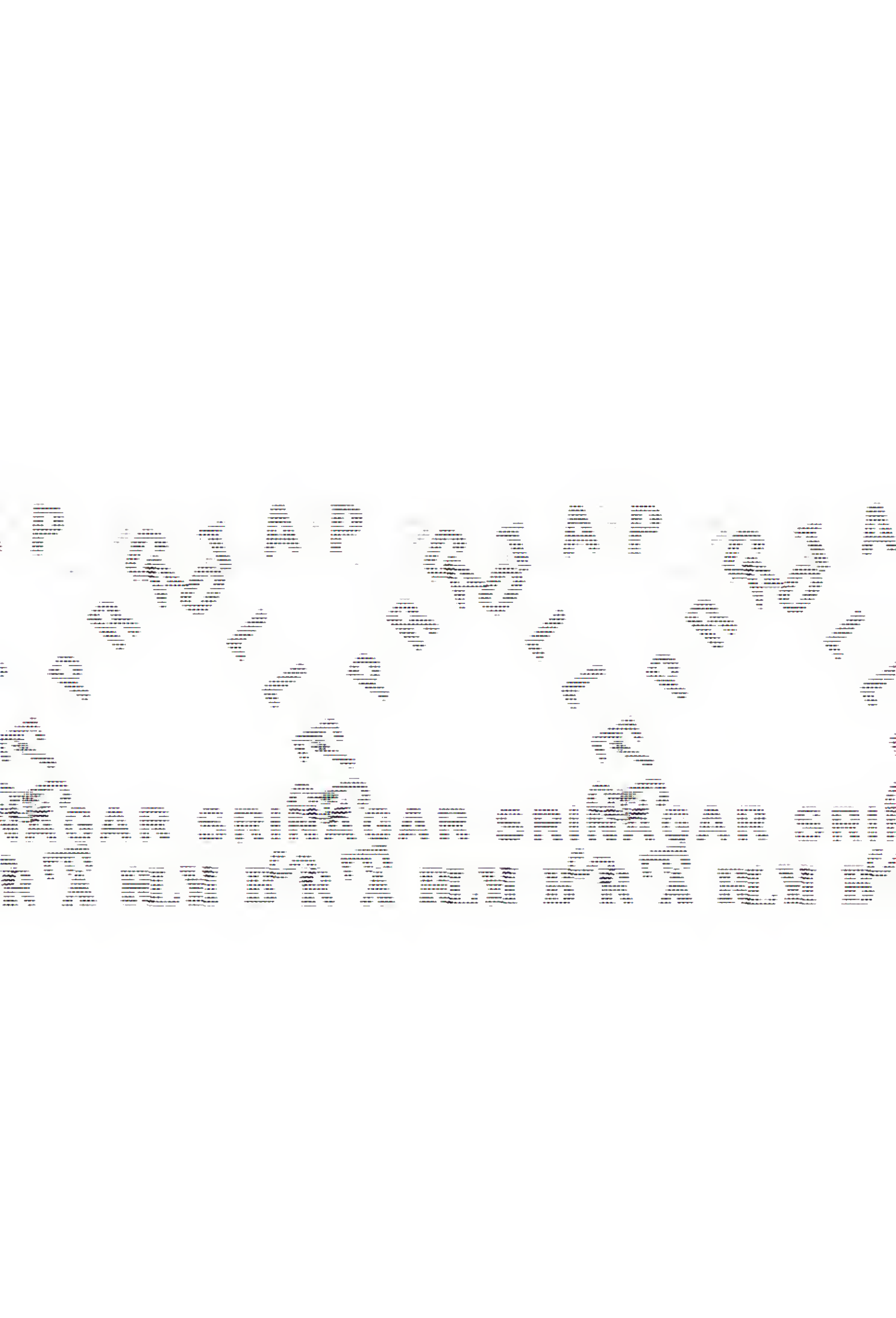
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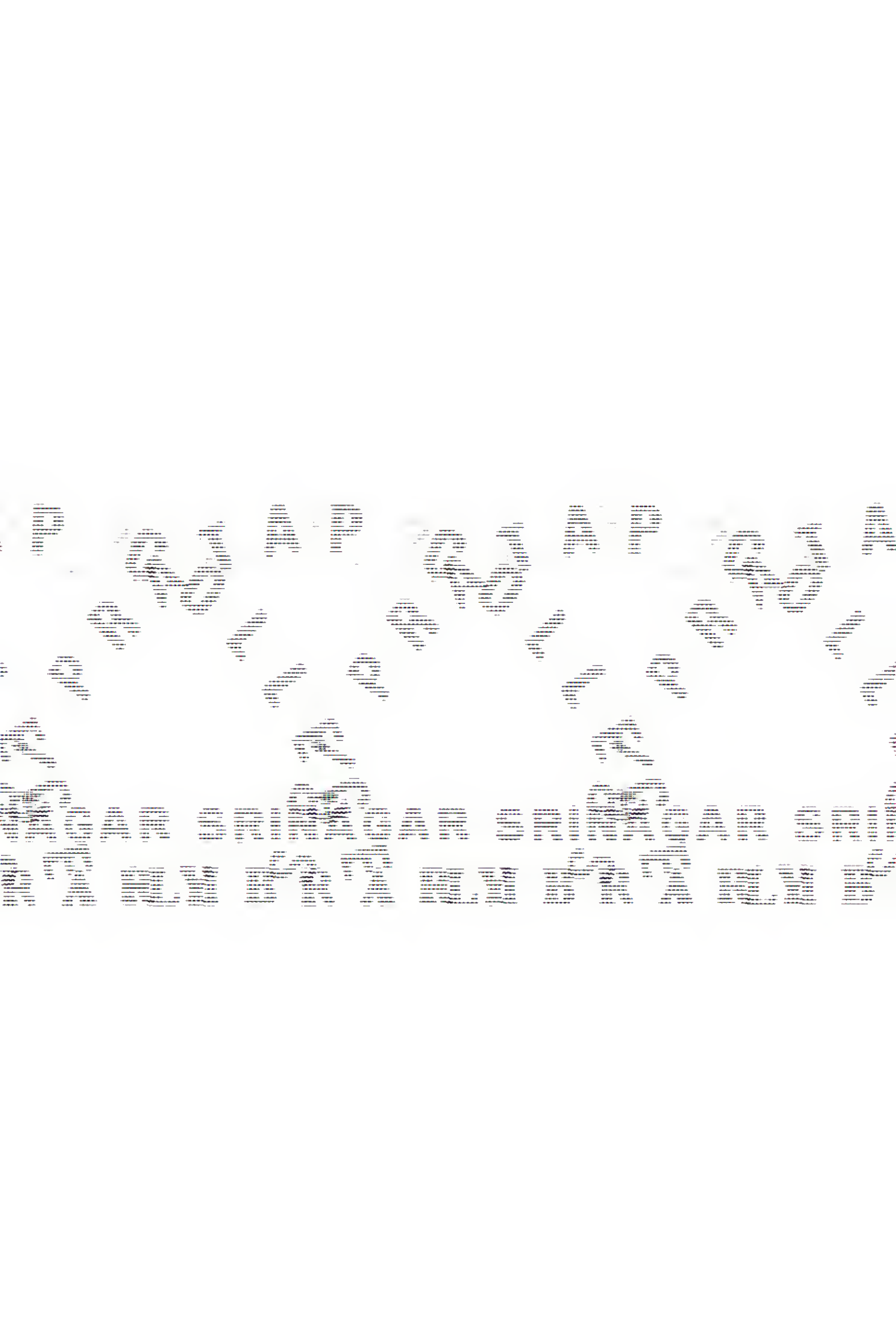
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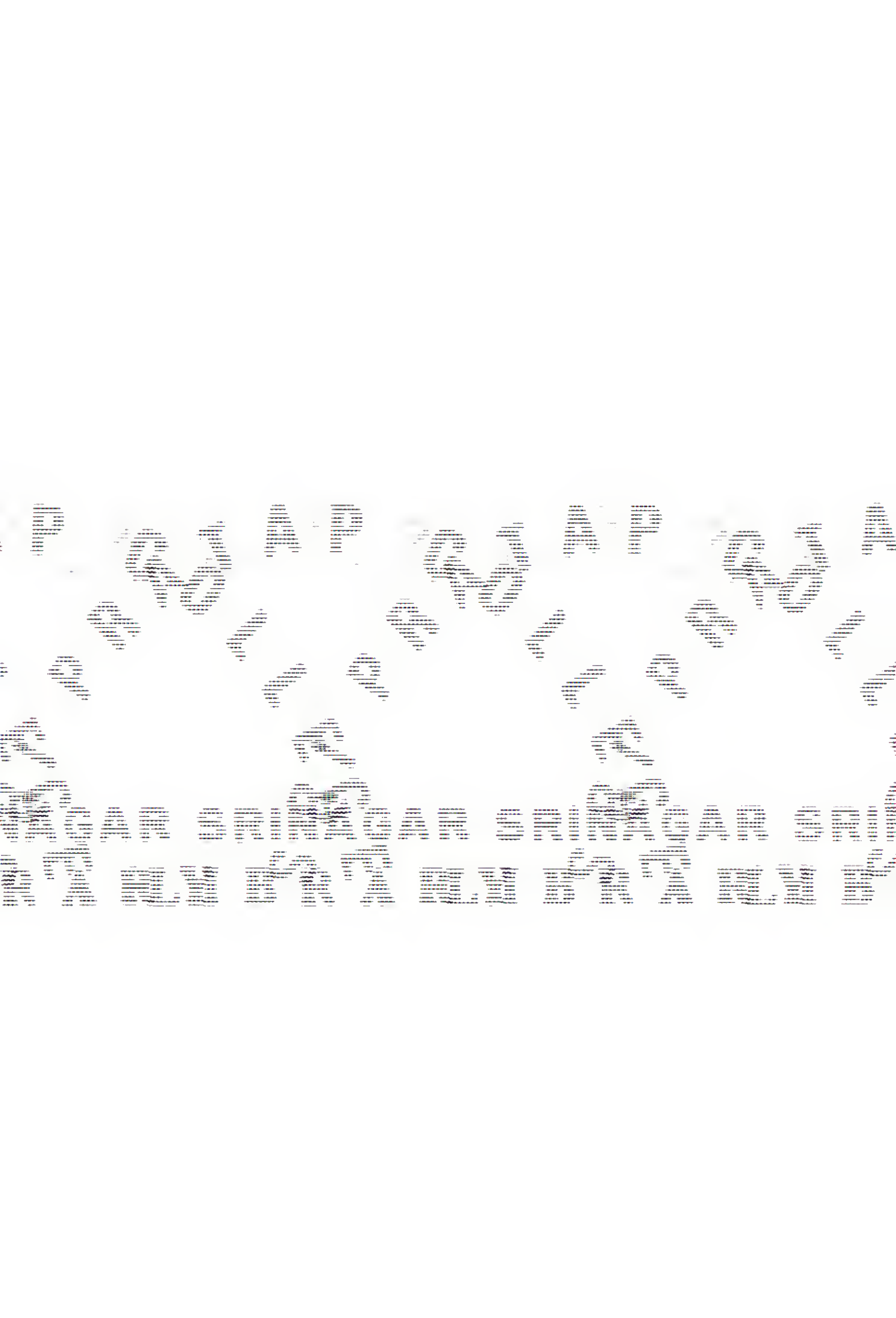
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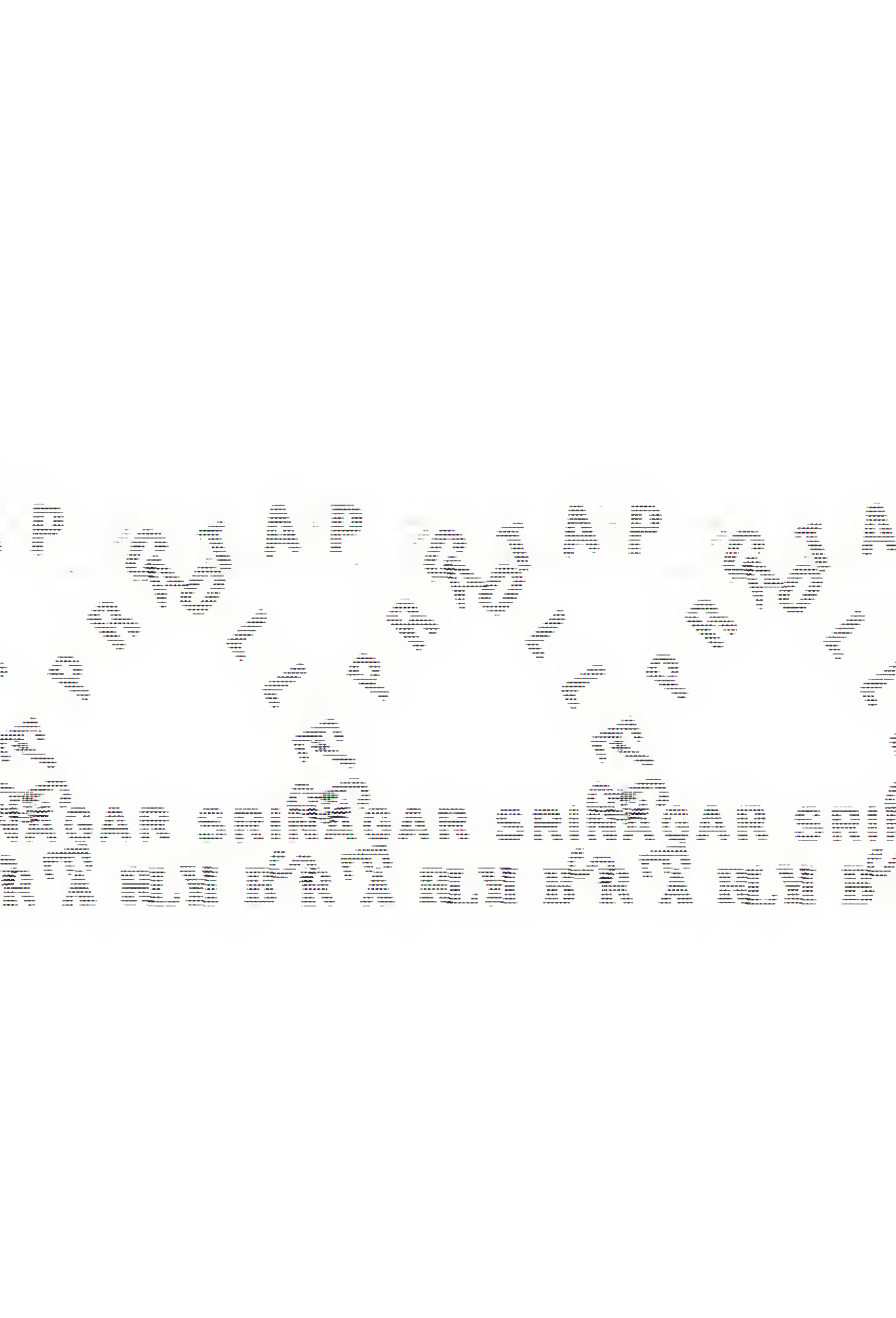


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Chapter I

WHEN LI CHAN-CH'UN could not stand the cold in the dormitory any longer he ran out and took the path to Chu Tzu-chen's small room. He found Chu Tzu-chen in the middle of mending a 1500 watt electric stove, his hands frozen. When Li Chan-ch'un saw him he could not help bursting out laughing, and said:

"You idiot! Haven't you seen the electric generator lying out of action? Haven't you seen the way it is frozen into a block of ice? Then whatever are you mending that broken electric stove for? If you are able you had better mend the machine first."

Chu Tzu-chen, quite unperturbed, continued coiling the wire of his stove with great enthusiasm,

and still with his head lowered over his work, replied: "What use are craftsmen whose hands are idle from morning to night? You say the power plant isn't moving, but does that mean it will lie idle forever? Does it?"

"Who knows? It's impossible to tell what will happen next. After the Soviet Red Army had turned out the Japs, plenty of Chinese came here; some called them bandits, and some called them Kuomintang. It doesn't matter what they were called, the main thing is that none of them cared in the least about electricity."

"Whatever they were, bandits or Kuomintang, since the Jap engineer is gone there won't be anyone to repair the machines."

"This is like hoping for snow in summer. Let's not talk about repairs which are impossible. Let's go out and get some sun and warm up a little. People say a bachelor has a hard time of it, but I say that's nothing compared with spending a winter without heat." Without giving Chu Tzu-chen a chance to refuse Li pulled him outside to walk toward the office.

Li Chan-ch'un had been a wood worker in the Materials Handling Department of the power plant. He was solidly built and strong, straightforward but sometimes a little stubborn. Chu Tzu-chen was a coolie. During the Japanese occupation he had swept the floor in the machine shed every day, and had secretly observed the machines; but he

never had a chance to touch them nor to watch their motion closely. Every three minutes the oil pump made a whirring sound, and this particularly attracted his attention. He kept thinking to himself, "I wonder if the Japs will ever allow me to look after this queer thing." He was the same age as Li Chan-ch'un, twenty-three this year; but he had a wife whereas Li had none. He spoke very seldom, being as shy as a girl, and could only get on with straightforward people like Li Chan-ch'un. In the distance now they could see Old Sun leaning against the steps in front of the office gazing fixedly at Dead Men's Ditch.

"Look, he's day-dreaming all by himself again. Have you noticed, Chu Tzu-chen, the last few days the old man seems to have something on his mind." Still watching Old Sun, Li Chan-ch'un nudged Chu with his elbow.

"Could it be that he's interested in that old widow in the village?"

"That's not what I mean. He keeps thinking about the generating plant down there. He's planning something, maybe — oh, well, he went down to the yamen to get the rations, and he's old and experienced."

Li Chan-ch'un's guess was right. Old Sun really was making plans regarding the generating plant these days. He sat in front of the office with lowered head looking at the generating plant at the foot of the hill, and could sit like that for hours at

a time. The generating plant had never before been so quiet. And the quietness was oppressive. Looking round one could see the mountain tops far and near buried deep in snow; but in past winters, in a snowy and frosty place like this, the machines made a great din. In summer, it goes without saying, the hills were covered with grey-green oak trees, wild apricots, wild haws, short brambles, vivid red wild lilies, lovely wild roses, purple holly hocks and innumerable other wild flowers. Birds sang, kites wheeled high in the blue sky; and at the foot of the mountain the generators roared. The north end of Jade Girdle Lake was as smooth and bright as a mirror; only the leaping of fish from time to time broke the level surface of the water. Now, however, the lake was frozen over, the wild flowers and wild grasses had withered and were buried under a coverlet of white snow; the wild creatures in the wood had gone into hiding, and all the people in the villages were taking refuge from the bitter cold in their thatched huts. Apart from the roar of the wind there was not a sound to be heard. Regarding the generating plant, it was really a shame: the machines had been broken by the Japanese when they evacuated. After August 15th the place was occupied by the Kuomintang who opened the inspection hole and let in water to flood the machines, so that they were now all a mass of thick ice. In the transformer station by the stream outside the generating plant

things were even worse: steel frames and insulators were jumbled together; O.C.B. were strewn left and right; screws, electric wire, iron plates and other objects were scattered everywhere. The four big cooled transformers stood idle. They did not generate electricity. They looked so much like scrap iron.

Seeing all this, Old Sun, who had been present when the power plant was started, felt thoroughly depressed. He stretched out his long legs in the sunlight for warmth. He was a tall fellow, well built with long limbs, long face and long nose, slow and deliberate in all he did. Because of this the young fellows often played tricks on him; they would take advantage of him, or give him a couple of slaps, and by the time he had got up to get his own back they would be already half way down the hill. But as a matter of fact all he ever did was to make threatening gestures, never losing his temper with the youngsters, whom he loved like his own sons. Old Sun, however, had one exasperating habit: when he met people under thirty whom he knew he would jokingly refer to himself as their father, particularly in the case of young women. Young people used all manners of friendly means to resist this:

“Who are you calling son?”

“Who wants a father like you?”

But whatever they said they could not make him angry, and he would laugh heartily. Only

once did he feel hurt, and that was when a middle-aged man, who knew his history, deliberately tried to wound him, saying: "Haven't you had enough of being a father?"

Old Sun was from Shantung. He had worked for people till he was nineteen when his father died. With his last breath his father said to him, pointing to the fields outside: "Land, peasants can't do without land. Work hard . . . work for all you're worth. Heaven . . . won't let down . . . good, good people." He did as his father had advised, and slaved away for five years, but he did not make enough to buy a single inch of land. Then his mother passed away, and then there was a famine. He lost patience, threw down his hoe, left his wife and son, and went to the district town to learn carpentry. He was industrious and clever, and in three years he came back having mastered his craft. By the time he came home his son Tiger was already nine, could light the fire and help his mother wind thread. His wife was a good hand at spinning, and for the past three years mother and son had been able to make ends meet. Sun was the best carpenter in the village because he worked quickly and was always on time. His business, naturally, was not bad. In that small family father, mother and child were all hard workers. They got on fairly well. Sun constantly repeated his father's deathbed words to his son, saying:

"If a man is industrious and works for all he's worth, he will be able to overcome all difficulties and won't be poor for ever." Sometimes when Tiger came home from school and was sitting on a stool winding thread, his father would sit down beside him, fanning him, and would say:

"How disgraceful it is not to work but just to eat and breed children. Then those children growing up wouldn't work either. They would just eat and breed children of their own. This is rich people's way!" Then he would catalogue on his fingers a dozen or more people: the son of this family cared only for food and drink and would take no responsibility; the son of that family was out to squander money; this one liked to dress well and go to brothels; that one thought because his family was rich he could do anything he liked.

Tiger would listen spellbound, looking up at his father and dropping his work. Then Sun would stop talking, put down his fan, smile slightly and guide the shuttle in the boy's hand, helping him to turn it. Tiger would feel embarrassed. Still, he would smile very shyly and get on quickly with his work, eagerly begging his father:

"Dad! Go on."

After two years had passed like this, when Tiger was nearly ready to graduate from primary school, his mother developed tuberculosis and had to stop working. She had to keep taking medicine which cost a good deal, so that the money they had

saved up with such difficulty during the last few years was all spent. After another two years she improved a little, but then came a year of great drought. It was a terrible drought. The earth cracked and split, the river bottom could be seen. As a result a grain of maize was as precious as a pearl. As far as Sun could see, if his family stayed there they would starve. So he decided to move his wife and son to the Northeast.

Gradually Tiger grew up. His mother was a confirmed invalid. Father and son put their hands to any work they could find, as tin-smiths, carpenters, machine cleaners, porters, coolies. Still good fortune did not come back to their family.

In the fifth year of 'Kang Te', the era of the puppet emperor Pu Yi of the so-called Manchukuo, the Japanese called for workmen to build a power plant at Jade Girdle Lake. Both father and son went there. Sun left his wife in Hsi Liang Chen and took Tiger to that desolate valley. Tiger was twenty-two then, a tall, thin, wiry young man.

Thinking of his son made Old Sun even sadder. If Tiger had lived, he would now be older than Li Chan-ch'un and the rest; he might even have married and had a son. Ah, it had always been a terrible place, that valley with its hills full of the dung of wolves. After the Japanese hired some twenty thousand workmen the wolves were driven away to Mo Ting Mountain opposite. First the wolves had been masters there, then the Japanese.

A temporary railway was built, rock was blasted, stone quarried, earth moved; little carts creaked to and fro filling the place with noise, building a terrace on the level river bank. Workmen excavating earth, pushing the little carts and carrying rubble formed a long column; and this column worked day and night, summer and winter, like prisoners kept under control by curses and whipping and the threat of death! Even now recalling that time Old Sun felt as if he were once again being beaten by the Japanese foreman's whip. He did not notice when Li Chan-ch'un and Chu Tzu-ch'en came up, and Li gave him a hearty slap on the back. Sun was just thinking of the cruel ways of the Japanese, and feeling a blow on his back he started with fright; but when he looked round and saw it was only these two good, honest fellows he smiled at them affectionately and said:

"So it's you two. Come and sit with father."

"Who did you think it was?" asked Li Chan-ch'un smiling gleefully like a child. With Old Sun he felt as if he were back with his own uncle.

"I thought it was Kawajima," replied Old Sun smiling. Hearing this Chu Tzu-ch'en laughed, but Li Chan-ch'un was annoyed. They both spoke at once:

"So you were thinking of Kawajima, Old Sun," said Chu with a smile.

Li Chan-ch'un said crossly: "When the Soviet Red Army was helping us liberating Northeast China,

you were as happy as a laughing Buddha. You kept grumbling every day, saying you were a Chinese, a Chinese; and if anyone so much as mentioned Manchukuo you flew into a rage; and you often talked of your friend, that big-nosed fellow Seminov from the Soviet Union, who gave you a medal as a souvenir — yet today you remember only Kawajima, but forget your Seminov. You even mistake us Chinese for Kawajima.”

“Well, that doesn’t make you Kawajima, does it?” sighed Old Sun, patting him with his broad palm. “As to Seminov, I can’t forget him and his comrades, either! They’re gone, back in their own country. They’ve plenty of work to do; they can’t stay with us! I can’t help also thinking of Kawajima and Suzuki and those wolf dogs, and the tens of thousands of our mates who were killed unjustly by them. . . .” Old Sun was too depressed by his thoughts to go on. When Li heard this he not only stopped being angry, but was affected himself by the other’s grief. He lowered his head too to look at the ruined transformer station at the foot of the hill. After a little while Old Sun said softly and gravely to the two youngsters:

“Ah, you workmen have nothing to do all day long. When you see the machines there not stirring, do you feel good?”

Li Chan-ch’un stood up and with a bitter but not unfriendly smile said: “Old Sun, what are you driving at? When the Japs were here I kept

noticing how you looked. You looked as if someone had offended you, going for hours without saying a word. When the Japs came you worked, but when only a few of us were left you would say regretfully, 'What else could we do? Everything over our heads was theirs, everything under our feet was theirs, all the food was theirs. When they came we had to work. Now that they've gone let's rest for a bit.' You taught us to be lazy. And when the Kuomintang officials came it was you who told us 'wait and see'. Now all the machines have stopped and nobody has any work to do, but you ask if we aren't tired of doing nothing — what on earth are you driving at? Take the case of that water wheel casing. It was you who tricked the officials into opening it, you who wouldn't let us close it. . . ." For the last few days Li, like everybody else, had grown tired of being idle and having nothing to do all day long. He had kept his feelings to himself, but now he vented his discontent on Old Sun.

Since it was a fine day with no wind, the sun was fairly warm, and more and more people kept coming outside. It was very natural for them to gather on the steps. Most of them were young men, but amongst them was Old Kuan, a man of fifty-six; Old Liu, who still believed in Buddhism; and Tung, thirty odd years old and a native of the place, who had been here ever since the power plant was built. Formerly the others did not like

to have Tung with them because he used to report what they said to the Japanese. But wherever there was a group of people, he would push his way in. When the Soviet Red Army was here, he also managed to push his way in, his face with all smiles. But his tricks did not work with them. The few days that the Kuomintang officials came to the power plant none of the workmen understood them, they were afraid; but Tung went of his own accord to see the Kuomintang officials, using the same flatteries by which he had tried to ingratiate himself with the Japanese. As a result he was able to lord it over the rest of the workmen again, ordering this one to go to Hsi Liang Chen some dozen miles away for meat and wine, directing that one to do sweeping and cooking; telling one to present a chicken, sending another to get noodle. At this time, no one could have guessed that the officials had not come to rehabilitate the power plant, but just with the idea of making a little money and enjoying the scenery. Before long the Eighth Route Army recaptured the Lu Ming River, and the officials were frightened out of their wits, their only thought being to destroy the machines completely and then to fly. That day one of the officials found P'an Yü-shan and Old Sun alone in the machine shed putting things straight, so he asked the youngster and the old man what part of the machinery was most indispensable. P'an Yü-shan was timid, and since

he understood neither machines nor what the question was about, he could not answer. Old Sun guessed the official's intention at once, suspecting that he meant to cause further damage to these already broken machines. So he started figuring to himself: "Does he want to find out how much I know, or something else. If he wants to destroy the machines, I shan't let him." Just as he was wavering the official turned to him for an answer. His heart started thumping, for to tell the truth he was just as afraid of these officials as he had been of the Japanese. He was afraid if he deliberately lied about the machines the official might have him shot; yet if he told the truth the official would destroy the machines. "And if they blast them with dynamite again, what chance is there of their ever being repaired?" He took a bold stand and thought of a way to deceive them. Looking as simple and stupid as he could, he pointed to the inspection hole and said in a small voice to the official:

"I don't understand machines, but I've heard that that is the most important thing. If once it is opened all the saints in heaven couldn't close it again: the whole machine shed would be flooded, and the water would even reach the mountain top." Sure enough, as the officials were leaving, they hastily opened the inspection hole, and then fled for their lives. Water came pouring in a torrent from the inspection hole, every day lapping over

the water wheel, flooding the machine shed with over a foot of water. When it reached the height of over a foot the water flowed out, flowed into the stream in front of the transformer station, and finally joined the Lu Ming River.

Old Sun's cleverness saved the machines from those obnoxious and stupid officials. Thereafter 'The water would even reach the mountain top' became a standing joke. Whenever the workmen were in good spirits they would bring up this joke and affectionately praise Old Sun's astuteness. Each time Tung heard this he made a mental note of it, thinking that when the Kuomintang came back he would have some fine material for them again. As a matter of fact he had no quarrel with Old Sun, but it was his nature to curry favour with his superiors by telling them the bad things other people had said, in this way proving his own 'loyalty'.

Actually it would have been only too easy to close the inspection hole. All they had to do was to shut the culvert in the north end of the lake; and after the water had stopped flowing in to close it. But Old Sun was afraid the bandits or the Kuomintang would come back and spoil the machines again, so he would not let them do this. Only when winter came he said it might be closed, but by that time they could not fasten it firmly: a little water kept trickling out and accumulating,

with the result that now the machines and the machine shed were all frozen over.

Old Sun was an ordinary workman in the power plant. Because he had been there longer than anyone else and was so open and above board, and because what he said and did represented their opinions, they all listened to him. After the bandit Ma Yü-shan raided them it was he who proposed sending a representative to the district government to ask for help, with a satisfactory outcome; and it was he who tricked the Kuomintang officials and saved the machines. These things in particular made the other workmen look up to him even more. When the Soviet Red Army was here, he was made a foreman.

Tung was a little jealous of Old Sun, but he had lost his power after the Kuomintang's departure. So, everybody despised him. He felt himself that he did not have a single bone in his body, like a snail. If he had had a shell to protect him he would have pushed his way right and left. But lacking this shell he felt soft and dejected.

Old Sun was feeling particularly bad about the fact that the machines were now all covered with ice. And now that Li Chan-ch'un had attacked him, he felt even worse. Seeing so many people, his mind started working again, and he took the opportunity to correct Li Chan-ch'un, saying gravely:

"Chan-ch'un, you mustn't talk like that. What one says, what one does, all depends on circum-

stances. I have lived forty-eight years, and in all these years I have learned to shirk work, to swear at people, to cheat people and to believe in nothing. It would take too long to finish the list. When I was a youngster and looking after the crops there was nobody who worked harder than I, and two of you wouldn't have been my equal. Of course that was in the China of yesterday."

"Oh, so you were a farmer once!" said P'an Yü-shan.

"My two hands were never idle long enough to smoke even half a pipe. Not only did I hate to rest, but it annoyed me to see anyone else resting."

"Then when did you learn to shirk work?" someone asked.

"Do you want to hear? It's a long story, but a simple one. I was poor, I hadn't enough land to farm, nor enough capital to start a business. On top of that there was sickness in our family, and then a drought; so you can imagine we had a thin time of it. When we came to the Northeast under the Japs naturally it was worse. When they wanted to build the power plant the Japs promised us the best rice and flour and good pay. Well, they cheated us. We had husks and millet and bean cake to eat; and we were only paid every two or three months while even then they deducted something for food, so that what was left was not enough to support a family! Lots of people died, some of sickness, some of overwork. There were

twenty thousand who came to work, but by the time the electric plant was finished there weren't many left: at least fifteen thousand had died!"

Old Sun thought of the summer, when men naked from the waist up worked in an unbroken line pushing soil and rubble from the mouth of the quarry to over a mile away. At each step a man was bathed in sweat, so in over a mile how much sweat must there have been! They arrived with hearts full of hope: the best rice and flour, a bright future for electric workers. But they learned the truth within a few days, and their hopes flowed out with the sweat, falling drop by drop into the ground.

After sweating and drinking unboiled water it was easy to get cholera and dysentery; and when a man's stomach had ached for a day or so he writhed in pain for a short time on the kang, and that was the end of him. If your head ached or you had fever you had to work just the same. Only when your eyes were closed in death could you be said to have come to the end of your troubles. Many tried to escape, and those who were lucky succeeded. The unlucky ones, however, were dragged back, accused of espionage for the anti-Japanese guerrilla forces, or of treason, and tortured to death. At first when people died the Japanese had their corpses thrown into the lake to feed the fish. Then there were so many of them that they were deposited in the valley for the con-

sumption of the wolves — that valley in front of the works had a stench that rose to heaven, and, piled with white bones, was known to the workmen as Dead Men's Ditch. And when he thought of the tens of thousands of mates who had lost their lives in such a cruel fashion, he thought of the untimely death of his own son. Soon after they reached Jade Girdle Lake Old Sun had sized up the situation and lost hope. Tiger, however, was as high-spirited as his father had been at his age, with a will to work and determined to make good. And it was just this keenness of his that caused his death. This was what had happened:

One day they wanted to blast a very dangerous big rock. The Japanese always tried to save labour and materials. As they had not used iron supports, not a soul dared crawl into the cave and light the fuse — no, thank you. The cursed Japs did not swear at them or order anyone in this time. They only tried to incite them: "Ah, Manchukuo, those who are brave will get prizes, those who aren't afraid. . . ." The courage natural to a young man moved Tiger to square his shoulders and walk into the cave, while his father was powerless to stop him. Sun could only close his eyes, feeling as if he were awaiting execution. Seconds passed and nothing happened. He had never realised that one second could seem so long. Now he understood it was because his son's life depended on those few seconds! After the explosion Tiger came running

out as nimbly as a mountain rabbit, not a hair on his body harmed. All the workmen outside the cave congratulated him as if he had been resurrected from the dead. His father wept for joy, while the cursed Jap guards smiled and patted him on the back. Afterwards whenever there was any dangerous blasting to be done they called on him. So a month later, while he was blasting for them, Tiger was crushed to death.

When Old Sun was telling this story, there were many people listening, some of them women. As they listened the old men and women shed tears. Old Sun himself was quite calm, as if he had felt no grief. In fact, his grief had long since turned into fierce resentment.

“How can he keep from crying?”

“A manly man sheds blood, not tears,” someone explained for Old Sun. “Let him go on.”

“I understood perfectly! If we don’t work hard, we poor people will starve to death. On the other hand, if we work hard we will die of overwork or illness! Death is all we can expect. As for those sayings ‘Every cloud has a silver lining’, ‘Every dog will have its day’ — I don’t believe a single one of them.” Old Sun sighed imperceptibly, then continued: “What could we do? Apart from going on lockadaisically with the job, was there anything better we could do? And at that time which of us Chinese coolies was not indifferent with his job?”

"In the ninth year of Kang Te the power plant was finished. When the culvert was opened the lake water came pouring in along the canal. The water wheel started moving, generating electricity. Think of all the Chinese coolies whose blood was poured out for that canal, three thousand metres long! Think of all the lives sacrificed to it. No one can measure the amount of water that pours through day after day; but not all that water will ever be able to wash away the hatred in our hearts! . . . "

When Old Shun had finished his long story, each one fell to thinking of his own sorrows. Which old person had not a child? Which young man had not a father or mother? So long as no one talked about it, the matter did not come up to the mind, or perhaps everyone had seen so many Japanese atrocities, and got used to them that he paid little attention to them. Now listening to Old Sun, each one thought of his own sufferings. Old Kuan's daughter-in-law had been raped by the police; Li Chan-ch'un's uncle had gone out to work and never came back; a lot of people's houses or land had been confiscated on some pretext; small trades people had been accused of breaking the economic regulations and been arrested; as for beatings and cursings they were an everyday occurrence.

"He's quite right; it was just like that," said Old Kuan emphatically, looking up and twirling his moustache.

"We craftsmen have certainly had plenty to put up with! Not even allowed to look at the machines," put in Chu Tzu-chen indignantly.

"When all's said and done, it was our own fault. Whether they ill-treated us or not, if we had been a little more patient, we would have got along better." As Tung spoke his beady eyes darted from face to face to watch everybody's reaction. He paused for a moment, and bit his lip so that the fat on his face moved. Then he went on:

"A man needs three meals a day and a roof over his head at night. So if you obey orders it's for your own good. The people of Manchukuo don't realise this truth."

"Old Tung, do you still talk of Manchukuo? Haven't you had enough of belonging to Manchukuo? What are you driving at? It's all very fine to flatter and curry favour, but that's not our way! If all Chinese had been like you, then, then do you suppose the Japs would have been beaten last year? Would we be here now?" Here Old Sun had stood up slowly, drawing himself up to his full height. He felt this was more than he could stand, and lost his temper, lost his usual tolerance and good humour, like someone who has drunk too much and must say everything he has on his mind.

Tung was annoyed, but he did not flare up. He only laughed coldly: "Here now? What is there so good about here and now? The machines are broken and no one comes to repair them; and

no one is paying us. Hah, if poor people want to make a living there are things they must put up with."

"That's right, you know. We've nothing to live on now."

"We want to eat, but we don't want to put up with any insults!"

"Now? Now there's no one in charge, but still it's better than when the Japs were trampling all over us."

"Right. With two hands we shouldn't be afraid of starving."

Everybody put in his word, and the argument between Old Sun and Tung was left undecided. An electrician Liu Fu stood up like a referee and called out: "Old Sun, give us your opinion. The Soviet Red Army helped us turn the Japs out, the Eighth Route has frightened the officials away. But the Eighth Route people themselves haven't come yet. In your opinion, what should we do under such circumstances?"

Old Sun had heard each one expressing his views, and knew that not many of them agreed with Tung. He felt calmer. Now that he was asked for comment, he smiled slightly and said: "I don't know what we should do. Let's discuss it together. The Eighth Route people aren't here today, but does that mean they won't be here tomorrow?"

"Don't be too sure of that. May be the Kuomintang will come back," said Tung confidently.

Old Sun paid no attention to him, but went on: "I heard people from Shantung say that the Eighth Route chaps are very good to peasants, so they have the support of the people. I wonder what they are like to workmen like us?"

"They are pretty good to workmen too. That time the district government heard that Ma Yü-shan had robbed us of all our things, they immediately gave us food and clothes. And I heard that in the city they gave people food too. It doesn't look as if they are like the Japs or the Kuomintang."

Liu Fu could not keep still, but called out again, "I'm not asking what the Eighth Route lot are like. I'm only asking what we should do with this plant."

Old Sun listened seriously till Liu Fu had finished speaking. Then he nodded with a smile and spoke out clearly: "That's right. It doesn't matter who comes to take over, this plant belongs to China. We ought to think of some way to get the machines into shape, and get the works into shape." Before he had finished speaking the others interrupted, all shouting together:

"That's right; it belongs to China!"

"Then we must think of a plan."

"How can we do that? We must find a leader, go into town and ask Ladylike Lü to come back. He studied in Japan. He understands all about machines."

"That's it — ask Lü to come as chief engineer. He can be a good liaison officer with the authorities. Last time we went to town as representatives it really looked too bad. We were all clothed in tatters, and could only stammer for fear. It was lucky we had Old Tung to act as spokesman."

"It doesn't matter about clothes," said Liu Fu, "the district government people dress very carelessly too. The only trouble is that Lü is afraid of bandits, and will never dare to come out to Jade Girdle Lake. So what's to be done?"

"Unfortunately, that Comrade from the Soviet Union has gone back home," a worker put in. "He knows everything about electricity, since he is a very able electric engineer."

Old Sun stood up, stretched out his long arms and motioned everyone to be quiet. Then he made a proposal: "What about this, first we clear away the ice, and clear up the broken machines and odds and ends; then we can discuss it again." At once there were cries of approval.

"Yes. Let's clear everything up and then invite Lü to come."

"That's about it. Let's do that. Quite likely by then the authorities will send someone to take over."

Old Sun had not finished with them, and followed up, saying: "When we workmen say we'll do a thing, we make a thorough job of it. If we do well, fine; if badly, we will all be responsible;

then if later they send people to take over they won't be able to find fault with one or two of us."

"Right! If we do well everybody will share in the success; if badly, everybody will take the blame." Several people approved Old Sun's idea.

Winter days are very short. Without their noticing it the sun had sunk in the west. Now the workmen woke up to the fact that they were very cold. They returned to their dormitories.

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Chapter II

THE DORMITORIES ON THE HILL were some seventy or eighty metres above the generating plant at the foot of the hill, and there were over two hundred and eighty steps up to them. The two old men in the repair shop at the bottom rarely went up more than once or twice a day. The younger ones, however, might make the trip three or four times. Although the dormitories were so high, sounds in the generating plant could be heard quite clearly on the hill top. And now the sharp sound of pick-axes ringing on the hard ice travelled through the frosty air to the people up there. There were about a dozen workmen down below breaking the ice. The driver Chang Jung-ts'ai left his own room and passed the large dormitory and offices, but when he reached

the top of the cement steps he halted. The last few months had made him lazy. He sometimes went to Hsi Liang Chen to peddle old articles in town. When he had money he would bring back eight or nine catties of meat and invite everybody to a meal; when he had no money he would go to sleep in his room for boredom, paying no attention to anything. Now he looked down at the generating plant which he would have to climb down nearly three hundred steps to reach, much further than a driver ever had to walk. He decided to sit on the steps in the sun for a time before making up his mind whether to go or not.

"What is the point of breaking the ice in February? In another few days it would melt itself," grumbled Chang Jung-ts'ai to himself.

Chang's wife now came out of the house, and seeing her husband still on the steps she began to be angry. She was below average height and wore a padded gown. She had high cheek bones, big eyes and a very pointed upper lip, altogether giving the impression of a capable and domineering woman. Her husband was as a matter of fact quite afraid of her. But this time she did not start scolding at once, she only tucked up the back of her padded gown and sat down beside him on the steps, saying, "Why aren't you going down?"

"My job is driving cars, not smashing ice or doing coolie work," said Chang, working himself into a bad temper.

"Aha, you're an expert, not a coolie. But look, if you don't join in now and help, do you suppose they will want you when the power plant opens? They'll send you packing and we shall go hungry. It's all very well for you to talk like that!"

When Mrs. Chang was only fourteen her mother died. Her father and elder brother worked on someone else's farm, and she had to bring up three younger brothers and sisters at home. She raised pigs and chickens, worked in the kitchen and sewed, and could do all kinds of rough and skilled work. She was her father's favourite, with the result that she developed a bad characteristic — everybody in the family had to give way to her. Naturally her brothers and sisters were all afraid of her, and her father gave in to her in everything. On the other hand as most children in poor families, however spoilt they may be, are reasonable and straightforward, so from a child she became able, enterprising and self-confident. When she was nineteen she married Chang and accompanied him from job to job in various small towns along the railway. Chang Jung-ts'ai was a rather difficult fellow that you would do well to keep on the right side of, but with his wife he was meek as a lamb. He had to do what she wanted. Only when the two of them were on good terms and joking together Chang might put his hands round her throat and ask her, "What use are women? Apart from panting and shouting what else can they do?" Although he held his wife by

the throat she was still as aggressive as ever, and would answer: "So you don't pant, eh? You are like an engine coming into the station, panting and puffing!" But she laughed as she spoke.

Chang had been very satisfied as a driver, but since the victory Jade Girdle Lake had changed completely. During the last few months he had not learned any new skills, only wandering aimlessly about the town and countryside peddling old things, getting more than he had previously earned in a month; so that he did not want to have any more to do with machines. This morning his wife had pulled off his bedding and forced him to get up, because she wanted him to join the others breaking ice. He had stayed in bed as long as he could, but here she was again at his shoulder, scolding away. She really was a nuisance. So he answered roughly: "You talk as if I'm bound to starve to death in Jade Girdle Lake. Haven't I legs to take me to Ch'ang Ch'un? Technicians can always earn a living, can't they?"

Seeing that her husband was in a temper, she said more gently: "Ch'ang Ch'un is Ch'ang Ch'un and here is here. A known place is always better than a new place. Why be so difficult about it? What harm is there in going down to help for a few hours?"

"Well, who was it that came and asked us to break the ice?"

"It was Tung who came. We've only the Time-server here who gives orders. Who else can beat him at talking?"

"Humph, I don't like him. He takes any credit there is, and leaves all the trouble to other people. His father and elder brother in the village seem to be very decent people: how could they produce a creature like him?"

"As the proverb says, 'Good people never come to power'. In a few days the authorities will be sending people here, and then Tung will be in his element again. Decent people like Old Sun and Old Kuan will never be appreciated. Only, as a matter of fact, it was Old Sun who suggested breaking the ice. I heard that the day before yesterday he got talking about his son again, and cried. He practically never mentions his son, I don't know what got into him the other day. But you take my word for it, he told about his son and cried, and then he said, 'Straighten up the plant, it would make my Tiger happy. Let's open the culvert and wash away all our resentment.' Then everybody listened to him. Frankly, everybody wants the works to start working to earn their keep."

Without listening carefully to what his wife said Chang Jung-ts'ai started walking slowly down the steps.

The broken down car frame at the foot of the hill was half buried in snow, sagging to one side. Seeing it made him feel depressed. He sighed to

himself. "After the Japs left everything has been washed up. There's nothing we can do for the works; breaking the ice is simply futile!"

There were all sorts of objects buried deep in snow, making the ground uneven. He followed a path that had been trodden out in the snow, and went into the machine shed.

The Number One Generator and Number Two Generator towered high and imposing in the middle of the machine shed. The big 120-ton crane and the small 30-ton crane had lost all their gloss, suspended pathetically from the high ceiling. On the ground was a layer of ice, one or two feet deep in the thinnest parts and a metre in the thickest parts. The steering wheels attached to the Number One and Number Two Generators each had two governors. Under the automatic steering wheel all was frozen over. The two oil presses, because the inspection hole had been opened and water had flowed in on them, looked now like two small mountains of ice. Four or five coolies were using pickaxes to smash the ice under the governors and automatic steering wheel. Old Sun was afraid that because they were strong and careless they might damage the machines. So he himself with two other older men was carefully breaking the ice on the oil presses. Between the two generators P'an Yü-shan was burning wooden planks on the ice. Li Chan-ch'un was sawing wood in the repair shop. Chu Tzu-chen was cutting the logs he had sawed into strips. Then

he took them into the machine shed. As for Tung, he was doing nothing but running from place to place, trampling on the splintered ice so that it crackled. He handed the others pickaxes and tobacco leaves, and shouted out that this was no good, that was wrong, as if he were busier than anyone, and as if he were a foreman.

It is still bitterly cold in February in the North-east, so that if you so much as stick a hand out it will be frost-bitten. Normally, in weather like this, you might tell people there was gold buried in the ground; yet they would not trouble to look for it. But hard work overcomes all difficulties. After one or two blows with the pickaxe their blood began to circulate more freely, they felt stronger and more confident. In this business of breaking the ice, nobody had issued any order, nobody had forced anyone else; only that day Old Sun had made the suggestion, they had talked it over together, and now had started to work. And not one of them could have explained what force this was that in late winter had made him undertake such a hard and thankless task.

Each time Chu Tzu-chen carried in a load of strips he looked to see whether the oil press had been cleared or not. And he thought to himself that if a day should come when the machines started moving, he would certainly stand for a whole day in front of the oil pump and see what it was that caused that whirring sound. And he thought that if the authorities would let him be an apprentice by the

machines and oil them, he would be overjoyed. Thinking like this he redoubled his efforts and split the wood in record time.

Li Chan-ch'un left by himself in the repair shop sawed away energetically. He thought that whatever Old Sun said must be right, and one couldn't go wrong doing as he said. Thinking back to the cruelty of the Japanese and the high and mighty ways of the Kuomintang officials still made him rather afraid and angry. He himself was as open as the day and could not stand tricky, underhand people. If anyone treated him well, he would treat that person even better; if anyone looked down on him, he would show himself even more scornful. As he was sawing wood he spat and said, "No matter how well it was running, it belonged to the Japs. Now it is all broken down; but still, it belongs to us Chinese".

Two old men of fifty or sixty were working as hard as their strength allowed. They felt the fire in their bodies was almost enough to melt the ice. Unlike the youngsters they had grown up in the old China, and although the Japanese had controlled the Northeast for fourteen years they had not for a day forgotten the mother country.

Looking at each one of them and at the whole scene, Old Sun was so happy. He felt like a superman. Indeed, each one had his own dreams and faith, and each one would use all the means in his power to realise his dreams, to strengthen his faith. Old

Sun was not different from the rest. His dream naturally was not for his son who had died so cruelly, nor for his wife who had died of grief. His dream was that the day might come when the machine shed should be in good shape, that the authorities should send someone to repair the machines, for once they were repaired electricity could be generated and people could work hard and have a decent life. His faith had been shattered into fragments by the bitter realities of the old society, but now the new age was bringing a ray of hope to arouse and excite him. The victor — the Red Army of the Soviet Union for the first time brought him the conviction that all men are born equal and that all workers of the world are brothers. He had little idea how this new society would develop, only knowing for certain that it was in the process of development. "The Japanese are the masters, the Chinese workers are their slaves" — this stereotyped society had already fallen into pieces for good. It was this that aroused in him new hope, that gave him strength, sagacity and courage.

In fact he had no idea who would control this power plant in future, or how they would exercise control. He only knew that the plant needed workmen, just as the workmen needed the plant and machinery. So no matter who came to take charge, if the machines were broken it would be the worse for the workmen. It was only because of this that he had the daring and the cunning to deceive the

officials and save the machines, and that he had the patience to head the rest in breaking the ice and protecting the machinery. If people had the same aim as he, he naturally allied himself with them; if people had a conflicting aim he naturally tried to correct them; he helped the apathetic to work hard, he showed he was glad to bear hardships and exert every effort, to sacrifice himself. His dream, his hope, his aim, were the same as the other workers'. When a man works from disinterested motives, he will find himself feeling happy and at peace. This was the case with Old Sun.

At first the men's ideas were not so clear, but seeing the enthusiasm of the others each redoubled his own efforts and exerted himself more; while at the same time his individual exertions increased everybody else's enthusiasm. By means of this mutual influence and mutual encouragement their energy and enthusiasm were further increased.

They felt that this kind of energy was something new, which they had never experienced before, and they did not know where it had come from.

Chang Jung-ts'ai strolled through the repair shop and had a good look at the machine shed. Then without a word to anyone he forced himself to step off his high perch and join the rest. When Old Sun saw that he had come to help he handed him a pickaxe in a friendly manner and said, smiling: "Mr. Chang, you understand machines, so come and

help us clear these here. We are only old fellows who can't do a good job."

"Nonsense," said Chang, forcing a smile, "as the proverb says, old age should be prized: the older you are the better."

"No, we have not the strength, we are too old." Old Kuan looked up, taking his cue from Old Sun. "Still, we have to get the works cleaned up. Whoever comes to take over at least it won't be the Japs. If we delay any of our jobs not only will the machines be getting rusty but we shall be getting rusty ourselves."

When Tung Chin-kuei saw the three old men and Chang Jung-ts'ai talking in such a friendly way, he felt rather envious, so he walked over to ingratiate himself by rolling cigarettes for each of them. Chang Jung-ts'ai did not give him so much as a look, but taking the cigarette said to himself: "What can have happened today, that even the great Mr. Tung is offering us cigarettes?"

Tung knew the contempt in which Chang held him, so he pretended not to have heard, and said in a conciliatory manner: "You are really working hard and deserve to be praised. When the Kuomintang come back in a few days to reopen the works, all of you ought to be given good jobs, and I hope you won't forget to put in a word for me."

"Don't talk rubbish. What kind of good job could we have? Later on when the government comes and you are given an important position, we

shall be more than grateful, if you remember your old colleagues and protect us, and don't tell the higher-ups all our faults."

Just as Chang was making these scathing remarks to embarrass Tung Chin-kuei, the young workers began bawling out loud. Old Sun listened and found they were not quarreling as he had feared, but were simply making up a song:

*Smash it once, smash it twice,
All together break the ice!
Old Sun is an honest sort
By whom we like to be taught.
He once got us rationed rice,
And he gives us good advice.
When the great officials fled,
He saved the works by what he said.
Look at all this litter here,
Pretty soon we'll have it clear.
See how much each one can do,
We're a strong and hearty crew.*

At this point Old Kuan put in, in a loud voice:

*We old fellows take great care;
We'll break nothing, that we swear.*

But the young workers would have none of this, and shouted together, "We take great care too. We shan't break anything."

"Don't shout," Old Sun begged them. "Carry on. Go on singing as you scrape."

*Making planks, fetching wood,
Li and Chu are pretty good.*

*P'an Yu-shan, Chang Jung-ts'ai,
Just watch how their axes fly!
Tung Chin-kuei joins the fun;
Just see how much he has done.*

But someone immediately amended this in a low voice: "No, it should be changed to: 'V'ery little has he done!'"

"Never mind, better not offend people like him," said someone else.

*Four fat fellows on the hill,
Lazy-bones, are sleeping still.*

When Old Sun heard this, he silently counted the men over to himself, and sure enough there were four missing. So he chuckled to himself: "These youngsters are pretty smart; there's not much they miss."

"You've been working away so hard without explaining why. What is each of you breaking this ice for?" asked Chang Jung-ts'ai.

"We are clearing up and straightening things ready for the Central Government to take over" was Tung's prompt reply.

"Those officials ran away and won't dare come back," someone contradicted him.

*We don't care who comes along,
Eighth Route or else Kuomintang*

Liu Fu straightened up. He had been chipping off fragments of ice in a corner. And he added:

*But until repairs are done
Food and money we'll have none.*

"Right. We workmen depend on the works for a living" agreed someone else.

*Broken wreckage left and right,
Blasted up by dynamite.
Pressure pumps and tanks of oil,
Lids and all they had to spoil.
Broken wire here and there,
Tangled coils everywhere.
Who will come and join the fun?
What's the best thing to be done?*

The song would not be finished until the job was finished, because whatever they did they put into the song. Only after four or five days did they get the machine shed clear of ice. And day and night they kept a fire going, so that the ice gradually melted. But the hydraulic governor, the main valve underground, the wormwheel bearing and other parts froze over again, and they had to be cleared again by the men.

For over a month the plant was undisturbed, and the workmen with different motives and varying degrees of patience battled with the ice. During this time the men elected Old Sun, Tung and the electrician Liu Fu to go to the town twice to ask for rationed food. The second time the authorities said they could not give any more rice, and the three men heard an official in another room say in a loud voice:

"How are we to get so much food? It would be better to dismiss the workers, or introduce them to the headquarters to receive their ration. How can a small town like this support a power plant? After

all electricity isn't all that important. Didn't we use vegetable oil lamps during the eight solid years of the war? Especially now we need to concentrate all our efforts to suppress the bandits and fight Chiang Kai-shek."

Another said, "The works are here, and it's not a question of spending money on repairing them. So why get rid of the men? Technicians are hard to find, so we ought to think of a way to support them. Haven't you heard? On their own initiative they have cleared away the ice to protect the machines."

When the three men outside heard this they began to breathe more freely again. Tung whispered to the others: "The first one must be the political worker."

"No, that was Commander Ch'en," said Liu Fu. "The second one was the political worker. I know his voice."

After they had taken back enough food for half a month, Tung kept boasting to the others that this was thanks to him. Old Sun knew that he was lying, but he did not say a word. Later he proposed that they should eat one meal of dry rice and one of gruel each day in order to make the supply last longer. Everybody agreed.

About the middle of April all the ice was melted; the underground rooms were flooded with water, with a thick layer of oil on the surface. This was turbine oil which had leaked out of the oil tank which the

Japanese had damaged as they evacuated. Everybody was at a loose end, some playing cards in the dormitory, some sleeping, some telling jokes or ghost stories. But Old Sun liked to potter about in the machine shed, seeing if everything was in good shape or whether anything still needed cleaning. Now that he saw the layer of oil on top of the water in the cellar, he thought: "This is turbine oil which was so precious when the Japs were here. Now one has to go to Ch'ang Ch'un or Mukden to get it. What a pity, what a pity. Seminov told me that in the Soviet Union they've plenty of turbine oil and that their dams are wide, tens of miles wide, which supply electricity to millions of people. . . . When can we catch up with them in our industrial reconstruction? . . ."

He thought out a plan: if they took two big pails and skimmed off this oil, it could later be purified and still used. "I must discuss it with the youngsters again. If they aren't keen nothing can be done." But at once he felt misgivings. "These last few days all their energy seems to have gone — every day they only have gruel to eat, nothing to look forward to. That's working for nothing. One can't blame them, but we must think out a good plan. . . ."

As soon as he came out of the cellar he met Tung Chin-kuei. Tung also liked to pay frequent visits to the machine shed, but his object in doing so was different from Sun's. He came to see what there was that could be picked up, odds and ends

that he could raise money on, and would pick up one or two things to take home and get his elder brother to sell for him. Old Sun told him his plan for salvaging the oil. As soon as he heard it he thought, "If all the credit goes to him, then presently when the higher-ups send people here they will think too well of him." But what he said was:

"Fine. I'll send out notices this evening telling them all to be here first thing tomorrow morning, then no one will dare not come. Don't you worry; leave it all to me."

During the last two months and more the men had grown tired of working without a definite objective, and the energy and enthusiasm they had shown when they started breaking the ice was gone. The next morning after breakfast only P'an and Old Kuan turned up at the cellar to work. When Tung saw this he was angry, and stamping up and down he said, "Why didn't they come? Do they suppose if they don't work they can go on eating here?"

Old Sun calmed him down, and climbing the hill himself he spoke quietly to the others: "Let's do some more work, so that when people come to take over they can't accuse us of not earning our keep. Make the authorities realise that even without the Japs bullying us we Chinese coolies can still get a job of work done! Come on, come down with me, it's good oil! Think we can't skim it off? Let's try and see. This afternoon we'll eat solid food."

All of them felt there was nothing for it but to straggle down apathetically. Mrs. Chang taking Mrs. Liu brought up the rear. When all of them reached the cellar and saw the water black with oil, each put forward his views: one said they should let a little water out before collecting the oil, another said the oil was spoiled anyway. Old Sun looked at the thick oil floating there and looked at the men, then took off his belt, stripped himself naked and walking down the steps put a foot in, saying, "Wait till I see how deep it is."

Mrs. Chang and Mrs. Liu had been standing behind the men, but when they saw Old Sun take off all his clothes they swore to themselves and turned to run away. Old Sun gritted his teeth as he let the icy cold, dirty water sear his skin. At the same time laughing at the two women, he said, "What are you running away for? Haven't you ever seen a man like this?" Then everybody burst out laughing.

"Well, if an old rooster like Old Sun is not frozen stiff, what are we youngsters afraid of?" said Li Chan-ch'un, stripping himself naked too and jumping into the water.

And so they got going. Some emptied water, others skimmed off the oil, and others dredged up small frogs from the bottom of the water and shouted that they wanted to fry them for supper.

For the past few days Mrs. Chang had been in good spirits, so she led Mrs. Liu and Chu Tzu-ch'en's

young wife, Little Ling, and the little 'Electric Motor' to the back of the stream with its muddy water to catch mole-cricket^s, until their hands were soaked crimson with cold. They prepared several meals of mole-cricket^s and beancurd for the men. And after it rained Mrs. Chang led them out again to pick up electric bulbs, mushrooms and to gather wild herbs.

In ten days they salvaged four big cans of oil.

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Chapter III

“MUMMY, THE CAR! There’s a car coming up here.”

When Mrs. Liu’s daughter Little Ling called out like this all the men and women on the hilltop ran out in front of the office and stood looking toward the distant slope. On the twisting and turning motor road that followed the contours of the mountain a lorry could be seen like a beetle winding its way toward the electric works. They began making guesses. Some guessed that it was people coming to take over, others that it was people coming to remove equipment, yet others that it was people sent by the district government to buy fresh fish. A lively discussion was going on when Tung called them all to attention by saying: “Hurry up and get the reception

room cleared up. Mrs. Liu, you go right away and boil some water. We must post some people at the main entrance to welcome them."

Everybody started bustling wildly about. Luckily the lorry was an old one and climbed so slowly that from a distance it did not seem to be moving at all. It was a good half hour before it finally reached the power plant. By this time tea had been made, and two decrepit sofas had been moved from somebody or other's house to the office. Curiously enough, Tung had had a sudden access of energy, becoming so busy that he was bathed in sweat. He had been filled with this same energy during the Japanese occupation; later when the Kuomintang officials came he had also been very active, but after they had left his energy subsided too. Old Sun was a slow-moving fellow; he sat very calmly on a stone, feeling that in a scene like this there was nothing he could do.

"They are coming just at the right time, the machines are cleaned up and the oil has been salvaged. Well, suppose. . . ." Thinking like this he felt reassured.

Tung took the first place and with several of the older youngsters following him went to the main entrance. The other workmen stood some distance off at the side of the road, while the women and children hid themselves behind the newly opened leaves of the small trees. When the lorry stopped several men in dark grey and light grey army uniforms jumped down, four of them carrying rifles and

one with an automatic. A man of thirty-three or four, of medium height, got down from the seat beside the driver. He was wearing the same grey uniform but had no rifle, and only three out of four buttons on his jacket were fastened, the fifth being missing. He looked very friendly and smiled quite spontaneously as he walked toward them, saying: "Workers, you have had a hard time of it. Which of you is in charge?"

Nobody said anything. They just smiled broadly. Tung took this chance to step forward, bent almost double in a deep bow, and replied respectfully: "We have no one in charge here, but when we needed supplies the others selected me as their representative and I went to the district government several times. May we know where you come from, sir? My name is Tung Chin-kuei, and since. . . ."

"Good, good. My name is Wang. Headquarters told me to come and see you all. — What about the works? Are the machines all right?"

While they escorted the visitors into the office the men with rifles stayed outside playfully teasing the children and asking about conditions here. By now, with the exception of the children, not a single person was idle; the rest were frantically busy pouring out tea, bringing water for the guests to wash in and preparing a meal; some had gone down to the village for eggs, others to pick wild brambles. The cook made up his mind to give them a good meal of noodles, Mrs. Chang chopped potatoes extremely

fine, and Mrs. Liu brought out the brass basin she had had at her wedding. Each of these busy people had his own ideas and expectations; but one hope they shared: "If only they hurry up and repair the machines, all will be well."

Some time before in the city Chang Jung-ts'ai had seen how ragged the Eighth Route Army looked, causing some people to call them 'The Beggars' Division', and he thought this an appropriate nickname. Actually he had no quarrel with the Eighth Route Army and could not say he hated them; but he thoroughly despised them, and whenever he saw them he felt like laughing. "How can anyone followed by only one man with a gun be considered a big shot? They don't even look as awe-inspiring as a Manchukuo police chief!" So while everyone else was busy entertaining the guests he retired to his room and had a sound sleep.

One of the visitors, Wang Yung-ming by name, had been sent by headquarters to be director of the Electric Company. He was also responsible for two other small power stations as well as this hydro-electric plant at Jade Girdle Lake. His main purpose was to rehabilitate this plant, because once it started generating electricity again those two other steam-engine power stations would not be needed. They would merely serve as transformer stations, thus saving a great deal of man-power and lots of materials. He had just evacuated from

the hydro-electric works at Ta Sheng, and had now brought here two of the Ta Sheng workmen.

After he had drunk a cup of tea and washed his face Director Wang went down the hill and made a careful tour of inspection of the generating house, talked with four or five of the men, and then called a meeting of the whole group at which he explained that the People's Government had decided to rehabilitate the power plant and relied on everyone working hard and thinking of means to overcome difficulties. He asked them all to express their views frankly and say just what they felt. In the afternoon he got into the lorry that had brought him and drove away, leaving behind the two workmen from Ta Sheng.

Of these two workmen from the Ta Sheng plant one was called Ch'en Tsu-t'ing, and was twenty-nine years old; the other, Liu Yüeh-hsüan, was only twenty-four. After the Eighth Route Army took over the Ta Sheng works Ch'en Tsu-t'ing was the first to become friendly with the Eighth Route Army people, and when the Workers' Union was established he was one of the most enthusiastic members. When the Eighth Route Army was retreating from Ta Sheng he was afraid the Kuomintang would make things too hot for him, so he decided to take his wife and child and follow Comrade Wang Yung-ming to join the revolution. As a matter of fact his understanding of revolutionary principles was no greater than other people's, but he was easily excited, impulsive and enthusiastic, like a drop of oil which,

when there is water, will float on top. At the beginning of every movement you will find people like this. Liu Yüeh-hsüan had spent two years in middle school and loved to study machines. During the Japanese occupation he could only study secretly on his own, reading a few books. As soon as the Eighth Route Army reached Ta Sheng he felt much more freedom than under the Japanese, so he carried a book about with him and whenever he had a chance he would take it out. One day when he was on duty and completely absorbed in reading an electricity textbook, Wang Yung-ming came up quietly to stand behind him, cleared his throat, and asked: "What are you reading?"

When Liu Yüeh-hsüan looked round and saw that it was Director Wang, he could not help trembling with fright, and his book fell on the floor. Wang Yung-ming stooped to pick it up. When he had seen what it was he smiled and said: "Very good. Workers not only have to know how to use electricity, but ought to understand the nature of electricity. How many years were you at school?"

Liu Yüeh-hsüan saw that the Eighth Route Army officials were totally different from the Japanese, so he calmed down, and hanging his head answered, "I had two years in middle school. Then my father died, so I had to leave, and I became an electrician."

After this Wang Yung-ming paid special attention to him and often chatted with him and encourag-

ed him. Liu would do anything you asked him, but he was shy of talking; whenever he had a moment to spare he would start tinkering with some gadget, trying out this, taking off that, or would study his books. He had a horror of meetings, and disliked mixing with people. When they were about to evacuate Wang Yung-ming asked him if he would like to go with the Eighth Route Army, and he replied briefly: "As long as it is somewhere where I can learn more about machines, I don't mind where I go."

Three days later Director Wang came back again to Jade Girdle Lake bringing with him Lü Ping-chen, a technician, two brothers Yang Fu-t'ien and Yang Shen-t'ien who had studied in Japan, also Ch'en Tsu-t'ing's family and some guards. This time he issued an official announcement to the effect that he had been appointed Director of the works, with Lü Ping-chen as Assistant Director, Chen Tsu-t'ing as Personnel Section Manager and Business Manager and Liu Yüeh-hsüan as Electric Section Manager. And he appealed to them all to work together to get the plant in running order.

When Ch'en Tsu-t'ing started work, in one day he called two or three meetings of the whole group, urging the workers to organise a union. He asked Tung, P'an Yü-shan, Liu Fu, a new arrival Li Hsi-hsien and others to act as the basic personnel. Very soon the Jade Girdle Lake Hydro-Electric Plant Workers' Union was established. Ch'en Tsu-t'ing was

elected Chairman of the Union and head of the propaganda section, Liu Yüeh-hsüan was to look after organisational matters. Tung Chin-kuei was in charge of the welfare section, while Liu Fu, P'an Yü-shan and Old Sun were group leaders.

Among the eight or nine newly engaged workers at the power plant Li Hsi-hsien was Tung's nephew. And Little Sung, Yang Fu-shen and Chin Yung-hsüan were all introduced by Li Hsi-hsien.

By now they had been working on repairing the machines for a week, Director Wang felt that the power plant was beginning to stand on its own feet: as a Workers' Union had been organised, enthusiasts were not lacking, and Ch'en Tsu-t'ing was very able; so he judged that he could leave them on their own, and prepared to go back to town. The evening before he left, he asked Ch'en Tsu-t'ing and Liu Yüeh-hsüan to his room for a chat.

"Can't you stay for another week, Director Wang?" asked Ch'en Tsu-t'ing. "I'm not cut out for this, and I'm afraid I shall make a hash of things. Besides, the engineer Lü is Assistant Director, so how can I order him about? As for the Workers' Union, it is not as easy to manage as the one we had at Ta Sheng, I don't know the workers and I'm a newcomer. . . ."

"Haven't I told you repeatedly?" asked Wang Yung-ming, opening his eyes wide. He had all the characteristics of the hot-blooded Szechuanese, and his speech was simple and straight-forward. When

workers of the Northeast who had been oppressed for so many years heard him, they had confidence in him and came to love him. Such was the case with Ch'en Tsu-t'ing. "In technical matters he will make decisions; but anything connected with the Workers' Union is the responsibility of you two. Do you get that? Whether the Workers' Union is successful or not depends entirely on you two! As for Assistant Director Lü and the two other engineers, try to see that they are made comfortable. Naturally their outlook is considerably different from the workers', but that is not important provided they repair the machines. The object of the Workers' Union is to enable the workers to cooperate so that they can get the works going quickly. The enthusiasts are very important. Just think how you came up from the ranks. Enthusiasts are like the framework of a house, only they need more careful watching: this is your job. Liu Yüeh-hsüan, you're in charge of organisation, aren't you?" He clasped both hands behind his back and paced backwards and forwards in the small room. Ch'en Tsu-t'ing watched him apprehensively, while Liu Yüeh-hsüan sat hanging his head in a corner; they were always tongue-tied like this in the presence of their superior, even though Wang Yung-ming took them both so completely into his confidence.

"What do you think of old Tung?" Wang Yung-ming wanted to test their knowledge of character, without waiting for them to answer he felt it would

save time to tell them his own view. He often did this kind of thing, always convinced that people under him could not possibly grasp a question as thoroughly as he himself, so he felt that to put them to a test or help them patiently was not as effective as telling them straight out, or demonstrating himself how a thing should be done; and so he came to neglect better methods of training.

"Don't just think he's an enthusiast. I suspect he is not too sound. His character is not too good, and he likes to show off."

"Still, everybody follows his lead, and nobody dares to dispute what he says." Ch'en Tsu-t'ing did not agree with Wang, and spoke tentatively.

"Bah, he acts one way in front of Director Wang, another way in front of us, yet another way in front of the others. We had people like that at Ta Sheng too." And thinking of the people at Ta Sheng Liu Yüeh-hsüan smiled reminiscently.

"Quite right. Liu Yüeh-hsüan's analysis is absolutely correct. People like that flatter their superiors and bully their subordinates — the typical Manchukuo mentality. To begin with you can make use of him to get things done; but on no account believe all he says."

"Director Wang, it's too heavy a responsibility; I'm afraid I shall spoil the work. Not to mention anything else, just that business of classes for the workers, I — I have already come to the end of all I know."

“Don’t be afraid to go ahead. You are workers yourselves, so in all you do don’t forget the workmen. You should be guided by one principle: be willing to sacrifice yourselves for the people and for the job, and then everything will work out all right. I’ll come over every three or four days. The unions in those two power stations haven’t even started getting going yet; if I leave them any longer some trouble will crop up. But for the time being we shall still need their electricity. Our factories, institutions and many different places still rely on them.”

And indeed Director Wang did divide his time between these two places. When he was in town he worried about Jade Girdle Lake, and when he reached Jade Girdle Lake he worried about the town. In order to maintain the supply of electricity he could not leave the two power stations. All the staff of the Electric Company with the exception of himself, Secretary Lü Liu-yi — his wife — and Business Manager Li, all three of whom came from outside the Northeast, were the old employees of the puppet regime. These colleagues treated their superiors with great deference, trying by all means to adapt themselves to the Communist ways; but no matter what they did, whether discussing democratic principles for all they were worth or shaking hands instead of bending double in a bow, or daring to sit down with Director Wang and ask him for a light, — in spite of all these changes their thought did not change. Director Wang was a very accurate observer.

He knew that there was no fundamental change in these colleagues' outlook, while if the work was to be well done he must make clear to them for whom they were working in order to change their negative, mercenary outlook into a positive, keen one. But he was exceedingly impatient, and wanted to get the work finished within a short time. Because of this he often criticised his wife, saying, "If I say you are a woman, you will get angry again. But I can't help it, the women comrades really aren't up to the standard of the men. To give one example, if you would reform these old employees, I could concentrate on improving the work. I've practically forgotten all I learned at Tung Chi University.

"When I urge you to get a move on, you say 'Changing the outlook requires a long period of time and that we've only been here about a month. If everybody were as progressive as you, wouldn't Marxism have been realised all over the world by now?' And if I become impatient and talk to you disrespectfully, you would say, 'Impatient people are bound to make mistakes. If the Party were to give you a more important position, I'm really afraid you would spoil the work by your impatience.' Liu-yi, speaking frankly, I am not afraid of myself spoiling the work; but with slow coaches like you, — hah, I wonder whether the revolution will ever be realised."

Lü Liu-yi was plump and wonderfully good-natured, never growing impatient, never losing her temper. Politeness, modesty and tolerance were her

chief characteristics, and on this account Communists and old employees alike had an excellent opinion of her. However, a person's strong points and defects are often bound up inseparably. Her politeness and modesty did not arise from the fact that she was experienced and could persuade people and correct their wrong tendencies; but because she lacked real understanding and the courage to oppose others. So that with her strong points she had weaknesses: politeness and a lack of a definite outlook. Furthermore, no matter how modest she might be, she could not bear to accept criticism from her husband, especially on matters concerning everyday affairs. She always tried to find arguments to refute him. As for him, he was not particularly prone to find faults, but because she was his wife he saw her faults more clearly than anyone else, for after all who are closer than husband and wife? So he often criticised her. Thus husband and wife frequently had heated disputes, sometimes in fun, sometimes in earnest, but occasionally they really became angry; and it was always Lü Liu-yi who lost her temper. She felt that he ought to appreciate her more than other people and make more allowances for her too.

Still, in spite of everything, they both took their work very seriously and felt their responsibility toward the people, because like all their comrades in the revolution they had only one aim: to try by all means to improve their work for the greater benefit of the people.

In summer the sun rose particularly early at Jade Girdle Lake. Breakfast was at half past five, so that everybody in the works, men and women, old and young, had to get up at five.

Lü Ping-chen did not get up late, but he had to wait till after eight when the Yang brothers had got up for his breakfast, and before breakfast he would sit by the window studying his notes. Only when the cook had come to call him several times would he stroll leisurely into the office to eat. Once before when the cook called him and he had to wait a long time before the others turned up, he was annoyed and lost his temper with the cook. After this incident the cook did not dare to call him until everyone else had arrived. He treated the two engineers very politely, almost as in the puppet regime, the only difference being that during the Japanese occupation he might have shown them even more respect. Now they had lost their power, just as the Japanese had, so he felt they ought to show him more politeness. Besides, he was Assistant Director here, and nobody, including himself, might detract from the dignity of that position. The reason he treated them with respect was because of their knowledge and education.

He had previously been engineer at Fu Hsing Engineering Works at Lu Ming River, and had frequently come to Jade Girdle Lake to help the Japanese repair the machines. He was very strong in theory but laid far too much emphasis on 'face'.

If the workmen treated him at all rudely he would be annoyed. Because of this the workmen nicknamed him Ladylike Lü. When he was annoyed he never swore at people, but would say with refined sarcasm, "When even you have enough learning to respect learning, the whole world will be civilised." Or he would say, "What a terrible thing it is to have no education." He imagined that such contemptuous remarks must wound the men deeply. Actually while he was speaking the workmen would nod, stand to attention and say 'Yes'; but at work they used his words as a joke. The workman in charge of electric wiring would climb up a high pole with the pliers, pursing his lips in the effort to screw the wires more tightly, and would say, "Damn you, when even you are a little tighter, the whole world will be civilised." And others would jump on to the high pressure line frame, singing, "If you're able, don't wear rubber gloves; if you're well-educated, bring back a Japanese wife!" When Lü Ping-chen was studying in Japan he had married a Japanese; but later when he graduated and returned to China she would not come with him. Although this had happened more than ten years before, and he had since had three children by a Chinese wife, still all the workmen knew of this, and used it as a joke to laugh at behind his back.

Yang Fu-t'ien and his younger brother had a Japanese mother and had been brought up in Japan. Formerly they could speak no Chinese, and had

lived like Japanese. They were unpopular with the men; but both of them were good at their jobs. After August 15th they were in a bad way and went to Harbin where they had to sell things to get enough to eat. Now the Electric Company had invited them back, and so they felt that although their prestige was less than during the Japanese occupation, they could still stand on their dignity on account of their skill. They had imbibed the Japanese Fascist teaching since they were small, and despised workers, farmers and Communists, so that now the very sight of the Eighth Route Army and the liberated workers annoyed them. In the machine shed if one of the workmen happened to be careless or not carry out instructions properly, they would curse him in Japanese; and when they were regulating the machines they would first order the workmen out of the way, because they were inordinately afraid of other people learning their skill.

They did not get up till eight, and breakfasted at half past eight. If Ch'en Tsu-t'ing happened to walk up and down in front of the office two or three times, they would go down the hill to work at nine; otherwise they would hang around till ten before going down.

Chapter IV

TWO DAYS AFTER DIRECTOR WANG'S return to town Liu Fu came to Ch'en Tsu-t'ing and asked to resign from his position as group leader.

"You were elected by the whole group, so how can I as an individual accept your resignation?" replied Ch'en Tsu-t'ing sternly.

"As Chairman you can make decisions," persisted Liu Fu nervously. "Nobody will dispute what Chairman Ch'en says."

"Why do you want to resign from being a group leader?"

"I'm no good at it! Better choose someone more suitable."

"Isn't it this? You're afraid of the Kuomintang coming back?" Ch'en Tsu-t'ing was inordinately

tely proud of his acute sense of perception and to show the stern stuff he was made of he raised his square face, lifted his eyes to heaven and declared: "Don't worry. If anybody touches a hair of your head, I'll make it up to you. You are a family of three: so am I. I can assure you that the Kuo-mintang will never be able to come back again. This place will belong to us people for good. Don't you worry!"

After his request was refused Liu Fu went home and grumbled at his wife, "It's women like you that get a chap into trouble, making me go and get snubbed like that."

"Everybody says the same: tomorrow the Kuo-mintang will come back, and they won't spare anyone who's held office," said Mrs. Liu.

"Tomorrow is tomorrow and today is today. I don't care what happens tomorrow."

Mrs. Liu was still worried and went over to find Old Sun, meaning to sound out his views. By a strange coincidence she found P'an Yü-shan there in the middle of explaining to Old Sun why he wanted to resign from being a group leader. When he saw Mrs. Liu he stopped talking, but she deliberately kept to the subject, saying, "Yü-shan, what are you talking about? What do you mean by that anybody who is elected would not want the job?"

P'an Yü-shan did not want to commit himself, so he simply grunted in reply. But Old Sun did not evade Mrs. Liu's question, and said deliberately,

"If you are elected to do a job, you ought to accept it. If the work is worth while, even if others don't want to do it you must still get on with the job. But if everyone is scrambling to do the work, it doesn't matter if you stand by with folded arms."

That evening in the political training class Ch'en Tsu-t'ing criticised the people who wanted to resign. "This is the Manchukuo mentality — decadent. In future anyone who wants to resign from a position of group leader or committee member will be recognised as decadent. We are workers, and workers are the masters of the new world. . . ."

Naturally after this no one talked of resigning. Ch'en Tsu-t'ing finding this method effective formulated his experience to himself: "It can't be helped, the Manchukuo mentality can only be controlled by Manchukuo methods."

Ever since the arrival of people to take charge, Tung Chin-kuei had been very active. He took every chance of attracting the attention of Director Wang, Ch'en Tsu-t'ing and Assistant Director Lu. In their presence he would invariably take all the credit for breaking the ice and salvaging the oil, saying that at first the other would not help, and that it was only thanks to his encouragement that they got down to work. All the credit that was due to Old Sun he suppressed.

Director Wang was very impressed by the way in which the workmen had looked after the

machines, but he did not believe it was Tung who had taken the initiative. "This is the noblest characteristic of the proletariat. Their labours cannot be separated from the machines or the works." Once he also said to Ch'en Tsu-t'ing, "But not for a moment do I believe that anybody like Tung put them up to it. If he did put them up to it, it would only be under compulsion. No, it certainly wasn't he; a man like that has not the qualifications for leadership."

Ch'en Tsu-t'ing disagreed entirely with Director Wang's view, but he could find no argument to refute him, so in the Director's presence he just nodded, but in his absence during meeting or political training classes he showed increased approval of Tung. This approval annoyed the workers exceedingly. Some of them lost all confidence in their leaders, some felt indignant on Old Sun's behalf, while some by their utter silence showed their indifference to the new regime.

There were over thirty workers all told, old and new, at the power plant, and they were divided into two teams. One team was responsible for transportation and cleaning; its numbers were larger and its work heavier, and Tung was the team leader. The other was the Repairs Team which comprised only Liu Yüeh-hsüan, Liu Fu, P'an Yü-shan, Old Sun, Chu Tzu-chen and two new metal workers and electricians; Liu Yüeh-hsüan was the team leader. All that the repairers did was

simply to carry the cleaned up things to the engineers, helping to patch them up, and using the hammer. The Yang brothers still treated them like coolies, pursing their lips with contempt, reluctant to explain anything in connection with the machines. Still, over a period of time the men contrived to steal one or two looks and picked up a little. The workmen in the First Team were somewhat jealous of those in the Second Team, especially Chang Jung-ts'ai and Li Chan-ch'un. People would talk, and some said, "The stupid fellows are put in the First Team." Others said, "All the Second Team are the elite, and the four newcomers are included for special reasons; for instance Chu Tzu-chen's wife is good-looking." All these surmises and idle talk spread like some wild climbing plant, or like willow seeds, flying up in all directions. Whenever people heard anything new they immediately passed it on.

One day it was unusually hot. There was no wind. The sky was azure blue. The little trees on the hill did not even rustle. No birds sang. The ferns in the shade of the trees looked absolutely unruffled. Apart from the clanging of the metal tools repairing the machines there was no movement. When Chang Jung-ts'ai saw everybody bathed in perspiration still working away so energetically, he tugged quietly at Li Chan-ch'un, pointed to the wood up in the mountain, and said, "Let's go; let's take this chance to be cool while

we can. There are plenty of people on the job." So the two of them climbed up the mountain side and sat down where the leaves made a shade. Li Chan-ch'un picked a fern leaf, looked at it and cursed, "You are sitting pretty, just choosing a shady place to grow in."

"Never mind, it doesn't live more than a few days, does it. As soon as autumn comes it will die," said Chang absent-mindedly. To cheer Li up he changed the subject: "We haven't eaten fish for ages: let's go and catch a few catties to feed ourselves. Come on."

"Then we'll be criticised at the next meeting for running away from work, and made to feel like fools."

"Never mind, by the time we are being criticised the fish will already be in our bellies," Chang Jung-ts'ai was afraid of being scolded by his wife, so he persuaded Li Chan-ch'un to go and fetch explosive and a cap and jacket. Li was a good-natured fellow, and when people insisted he would do as they wanted.

The lake was over a mile from the works. The two of them dropped a depth charge to kill the fish, and rowed about enjoying themselves until the sun was in the west before returning. They made a catch of over twenty catties including two big carp; the rest were flat fish, speckled fish, dog fish, zig-zag fish and small carp, varying from three or four inches to over a foot in length. They detached

two wires from a broken-down steamboat to string up their catch, and carried the fish back suspended from a small branch. When they got back to the dormitory everybody was delighted and crowded round to help clean the fish.

Ch'en Tsu-t'ing had been worried for some time because he had run out of materials for his classes, but today he remembered that Director Wang had once discussed outlook in life with him. He felt that this was a good subject and decided to use it for his class that evening. At seven o'clock when the gong sounded he went to the big administrative office which was used as a temporary classroom. When he got there not a soul was to be seen, and he was just wondering what had happened when Tung Chin-kuei burst in, wiping his mouth and at the same time apologising, "I'm sorry to be late!"

"You're late, but you're the first here." Since somebody at least had turned up Ch'en was rather pleased.

Tung Chin-kuei felt that Ch'en was praising him, so he said complacently, "We were eating fish. I had had no more than a mouthful when I heard the gong. So I came along." Then he embroidered on the truth, saying, "I called out to everybody to hurry up, but nobody listened."

By this time Little Sung, Yang Fu-shan and Li Hsi-hsien had hurried in. Ch'en Tsu-t'ing went quickly across to the dormitory.

The dormitory was a long room with a kang on each side where forty people could sleep. On the beds were tattered mattresses covered by dirty ragged grey quilts and rugs. Ever since the Nationalist bandit Ma Yü-shan had raided the place, nobody kept anything good here. The building had been repaired seven years before, but the repairs had been done with a view to economy. Since then much time had elapsed, so that it was in an appalling condition. Men with families lived in the row of small houses behind. Of the rest Tung with his nephew, Ch'en 'Tsu-t'ing's family, Lü Ping-chen and the Yang brothers each occupied a small Western-style house; the remaining two dozen or so bachelors all slept in the big dormitory.

As soon as Ch'en 'Tsu-t'ing stepped inside the dormitory he was assailed by a sour smell of sweat. A dim vegetable oil lamp lit up three murky groups of men who were gathered round three dishes absorbed in eating fish. Now to have a vegetable oil lamp in a generating house sounds ridiculous, but before electricity was generated again it was welcomed and preserved by all. Nobody noticed the entry of Ch'en 'Tsu-t'ing, who said, "Well, why don't you ask me to eat fish?"

Old Sun, Old Kuan and several others of the older hands stood up and invited him to take a seat. At the same time the groups started splitting up, some leaving the table, some leaning against the wall. Chang Jung-ts'ai did not budge, but

went on eating and said: "All the fish we caught today were small ones. We were afraid that at Ta Sheng you were used to eating big fish, so we didn't dare to invite you."

Ch'en Tsu-t'ing was thinking to himself: If I get on the kang and start eating fish, it will never do; they will call me The Greedy Chairman. Yet if I don't eat the workmen will say I look down on them. Wait a bit, there was something sarcastic in Chang Jung-ts'ai's remark. After a second, he said in reply to Chang Jung-ts'ai: "The goodness of a fish depends on its flavour, not on its size. A big dogfish is not as good as a small zig-zag fish. It stands to reason the fish here must be better to eat than those at Ta Sheng. Why? Because here the water is deep and slow moving, so the fish must be tender."

Hearing this Li Chan-ch'un who was very naive thought Ch'en was being most friendly, so he offered him his last two sips of white wine. But the latter had no intention of eating the fish. After accepting the wine he gulped it down in one mouthful, then reminded everybody: "We should be getting to class; it's long past time!"

When they heard the word 'class' everyone felt thoroughly disheartened and did not answer. Only some people grunted "Uhhuh" to show that they realised they must attend. In actual fact no one stirred. Mao Wei-liang who was standing in one corner whispered to Tsao Wan-fa, "Democracy, the

workers are the masters of the new world — even the blackboard in the classroom is sick of it!”

“This evening I’m going to study the question of outlook in life with you all. Hurry up.”

“What is the outlook in life? Is it that thing screwed on the water pump?”

Ch’en Tsu-t’ing could not help laughing as he led the way out of the dormitory, explaining to them: “Outlook? Well, now, it depends on what kind of person you are. Workers have workers’ outlook, greedy people have a greedy outlook; really the meaning is very complex.”

“My aim in life is to eat rice and fish,” said Li Chan-ch’un.

“In that case Chang Jung-ts’ai’s outlook is to be afraid of his wife,” joked someone behind.

Everyone laughed.

“I don’t want any more: just to have work to do and enough to eat, that’s my outlook” said Li Sheng the new metal-worker. Old Kuan agreed, vigorously nodding his head in the dark.

Once they reached the classroom nobody uttered a word, only Ch’en Tsu-t’ing held forth for over an hour with great enthusiasm on outlook. Some of the class went to sleep, some scratched themselves, and some of the youngsters made faces. At last Ch’en Tsu-t’ing asked, as he always made a rule of doing: “Did everybody understand?” The answer came in unison like a clap of thunder: “Yes!” The answer was given with such force

because when this question was asked it meant the lecture was over and they could go to bed.

Ch'en Tsu-t'ing felt that he had given a most comprehensive lecture. On leaving the classroom he took the path to Liu Yüeh-hsüan's place, this having by now become almost a habit with him. He found Liu reading, just as he did every evening. Ch'en Tsu-t'ing stepped forward, snatched his book and held it up, saying, "Your ambition seems to be an engineer."

Liu Yüeh-hsüan looked up in a preoccupied way, then looked again at the diagram he had just drawn. Idly he asked, "And yours, isn't it to be the director of a works?"

"Pooh, I'm not even up to being chairman of a Workers' Union. I can't control them. Just think, they eat fish instead of coming to class, and go fishing in working hours! What would you do in my place? When I discussed outlook in life with them in the dormitory, they all joined in talking nonsense; but when I took them to the classroom not a single one would say a word." And he described to Liu Yüeh-hsüan what had happened.

Even after Liu had heard it all, he still could not work up any interest. He stretched out his hand to take back the book Ch'en Tsu-t'ing was holding; but Ch'en deliberately kept a firm hold on it and would not let it go. Liu picked up his pencil to go on with the outline of the protection ring and bending commutator he was drawing.

He said carelessly, "Why don't you have classes in the dormitory under the circumstances?"

Not getting any sympathy from Liu, Ch'en Tsu-t'ing felt even more exasperated, and said rudely: "All right, you think technical skill solves all problems. You think if you stick to your machines the workers will become keen and the work will make good progress." He had learned a good many 'Eighth Route expressions' from Director Wang.

By now Liu Yüeh-hsüan was feeling a little ashamed. He took the book Ch'en handed back to him, looked at the oil lamp, and said, "I'm no good; I haven't carried out what I was entrusted to do. My head is full of electricity and water pumps. I can't think of anything else even at meals and in dreams!" He tried to make his meaning clearer: "You say you can't control them, but I believe they are scared stiff of you! No, may-be they consider you as an official: just think how polite they are to you and how they stop talking or laughing whenever you arrive." He bent his head, thought for a minute, then summoned up his courage and said, "As I see it, you're not like you used to be. You've changed." Having said this he regretted having said too much and hung his head.

"Whatever do you mean?" Ch'en Tsu-t'ing had been entirely taken by surprise by Liu's remarks, for he did not believe that he had changed. "Can't you talk more plainly?"

"I can't explain exactly. But ever since you came here and made a cadre, the others felt that you were not like the rest of us." Since he had already spoken out and could not retract what he said, Liu felt he had better be frank.

"But didn't you come too, and became a cadre? What's their attitude to you?" asked Ch'en, feeling aggrieved.

"Yes, I came too and was made a cadre, but I haven't been in charge of anything, I don't know anything. The men don't have any special feeling about me. . . . They're jealous of you and don't understand you. They don't want to make the effort to do any job themselves, so they should be pleased to have someone to take charge, shouldn't they?" Liu Yüeh-hsüan had never made such a long speech before in all his life. He was, however, afraid Ch'en might misunderstand him. He was genuinely anxious for Ch'en's relationship with the men to improve, so he made an effort to get his meaning across: "Everybody realises that, don't they? You are the only one that Director Wang trusts. People don't mind officials, but they don't like being controlled. They can't help being like that. Do you suppose people can't really think: 'I have the Manchukuo mentality', 'I'm backward', 'If I'm not asked it's no business of mine', 'If a job is well done the credit goes to the keen workers'? If everybody thought like that, he would go to sleep while you talked."

"You say even you think I have changed; but in what way?" persisted Ch'en.

Liu smiled and said, "Your temper has changed. You used to be very patient; if something happened that you didn't like you put up with it without saying anything; but now you glare at the least thing, and say, 'What's the meaning of this? Haven't I told you time and again; didn't you hear or are you doing this deliberately?' Or else you say: 'Very well, when Director Wang comes back we'll see about this.' A remark like that cuts deeper than a pneumatic drill! Sometimes I'm even rather afraid of you myself. — Something may be quite harmless in itself. But when you talk about it, it sounds quite different, and by the time Director Wang has passed judgment on it, it sounds even more different. Naturally everyone is fed up! Of course, to me you're as good as could be, only I'm no good."

For a moment neither of them spoke and there was not a sound to be heard except the tick-tack of the alarm clock Old Sun had lent the office. This made both of them feel it was very late. But Ch'en Tsu-t'ing was not in the least tired, in fact he felt full of energy. He said earnestly, "Old Liu, we've been colleagues for five or six years. I didn't come here to be an official, but to join the Revolution — you know that. I don't mind hardship, I don't mind being misunderstood, I want to serve the people. If only everyone would work together

to make the Workers' Union a going concern, my responsibility would be at an end. But look how people treat me. I didn't come to make money. My wife and child don't eat better than anyone else. . . . ”

“It's true that you haven't taken a needle or thread more than other people, but it's also true that now everyone is afraid of you, and won't co-operate with you. They talk one way in front of you, and quite another way when they are on their own. But what they say in meetings or in class is all made up, and not what they believe.”

“What have you heard them say?” Ch'en 'Tsu-t'ing did not really want to hear the group's opinion in order to improve himself, but felt curious about their gossip and wanted to hear details.

“I don't mind telling you, as long as you don't bring it all up in class tomorrow evening and lecture everybody; because after that they would avoid talking in front of me, and they would not feel very happy about it. What do they say? Well, they say ‘The Eighth Route are all right; it's the Seven and a Half Route that we can't stand.’ And they've made up a song: ‘The Timeserver is considered a keen worker; the really good chaps are not used.’ They are always talking like this.” Liu Yüeh-hsüan sighed and went on, “Oh, these things are all futile. But today I asked Yang Shen-t'ien something about the water-pump. He

laughed down his nose at me and said, 'So you want to be an engineer too. Why didn't your mother send you to Japan to study?' Don't you think that's maddening, as if engineers could only be trained in Japan!"

"So by the Seven and a Half Route they meant me," said Ch'en Tsu-t'ing, thinking of the phrase that rankled most.

"Sure. Damn it all, do I have to have money to go to Japan to study if I want to be an engineer!" Liu Yüeh-hsüan was also thinking of the phrase that rankled most.

"I ask you: by Seven and a Half Route do they mean that people like us who joined after the victory are not up to the standard of the Eighth Route lot?"

"Who knows?"

When these two were engaged in this lively discussion, over in the dormitory P'an Yü-shan and Li Chan-ch'un were also having an argument which had arisen because P'an Yü-shan blamed Li Chan-ch'un for leaving his work and going to catch fish. By this time everybody was in bed, the oil lamp had been blown out, and all the others were snoring.

"It's not my luck to be a keen worker, and I'm not cut out to be a keen worker. I know that I'm not even up to the Sixth Route, let alone hoping to study mechanics." Li Chan-ch'un was not a grumbler, but being criticised put his back up, so

he became obstinate and brought up all his usual grievances.

"Two months ago when we broke the ice, weren't you very glad to join in and very energetic? So now, who are you angry with?"

"Nobody's offended me, and I'm not angry with anyone. Only I don't like all this ordering about! When we broke the ice and salvaged the oil, everyone was happy together and on an equal footing; that was the time of real equality, and nobody bossed anybody else. Now some people live in a big pigsty, some people live in Western-style houses; some people are chief this or that, and some people are coolies. Only just out of the nest, without even having grown feathers, and he starts flapping about: it really makes me mad. Don't think because no one says anything or because I'm a good-for-nothing that makes it right. . . ."

"We are here to do a job. Why worry what he does? His flapping about won't hurt you. He understands more than we do, so at least he is better than we are." P'an Yü-shan's one idea still was to help him get over his indignation.

Li kept on grumbling: "You are too easily taken in by what they say: workers are the masters, you are a master too!"

"We aren't masters of any kind yet, we are still workmen—I know that. And since we're workmen let's just attend to our work!"

Old Sun was woken up by their noise. He asked in bewilderment, "What's all this master-workmen business? You children ought to be asleep."

"Old Sun, come quick and decide between us. This evening Manager Ch'en criticised him in the class. I was giving him good advice, and he got angry with me. You come and judge." P'an Yü-shan appealed to Old Sun.

"Nobody's made any rule about it, so what law am I breaking by catching fish? Other people go to the river to bathe."

Old Sun sat up, fanning the two youngsters with a piece of tin while he wiped away his own perspiration. The tin glinted as he waved it and made a whirring sound among the snores. Some time passed before Old Sun spoke: "The great trees, they all grow silently in the forests on the mountain; coral and pearls too, they come into being without a sound at the bottom of the sea; heroes and real men have to have their mettle tested in the rough and tumble of life — What are you two making such a fuss about?" As he spoke these few words calmly at their side P'an felt there was no need to go on with the dispute. Li, however, still felt rather upset: "Right, right. Hah, an old man like you deserves to have a lifetime of troubles!"

Hearing what Li Chan-ch'un said Old Sun continued placidly: "Well, I don't bear any grudge,

I don't bear the least grudge for a lifetime of troubles! The only thing is, we've got to get these machines repaired sooner or later, and the quicker the better. You say, apart from seeing to the machines what else can we do with our hands? Catching fish is all very fine, but when they're eaten that's the end of them; whereas the machines may run for generations."

"That's right, they do run for generations. Technical skill is a proper thing—it's an iron rice bowl that can't be broken!"

Someone had interrupted to agree, and listening carefully Old Sun recognised the voice of the new electrician Wu Hsiang-t'ai.

The youngsters did not say any more. They soon started snoring.

"Old Wu, so you aren't asleep yet," Old Sun greeted Wu in the darkness.

"Those two have been quarreling so long. How could anyone sleep properly? You are older and more experienced than us. Do you think there has really been a radical change?" Wu spoke respectfully and crawled over to lie next to Old Sun.

"Sure, there's been a change. Look at these youngsters." The experienced old man could not fathom the other's meaning, so he made an ambiguous answer.

"Here we are, liberated, and I want to say what I think of it. Let me tell you a story about liberation," said Wu, weighing his words. "I was

working in an electric plant. After the victory I lost my job and joined a training class. An Eighth Route Army instructor said to us: 'Workers, comrades, you are fortunate. The Soviet Red Army has helped us liberate the Northeast. You're now masters of the country, and your job is to build up a new society under the leadership of the Communist'. At that time I had no idea what Communists were like, and I was furious at what he said. So I stood up and retorted, 'Yes, we have been liberated. When the Japs were here it was as if they kept us in chains. Now you have come and at one stroke broken those chains. We are free, but our legs still show the wound you made when you broke our chains.' Everybody laughed. The instructor turned red, made a note of my name, and did not say anything. Three days later Department Head Li sent for me. I thought 'It's all up'. I had already made plans to return to Mukden. When Department Head Li saw me his first words were: 'You are a real Chinese workman, stout fellow.' Well, how do you suppose I felt when I heard that? It was like rain in time of drought! He went on: 'Why do you think you lost your jobs?' That was a question I found it hard to answer. What I thought was 'You Eighth Route people don't understand skilled work' — but I couldn't very well say that. I remained silent for some time. Then he explained it to me: it was because of the war, because not all the workers

were class-conscious enough, because of . . . various other reasons. He also said that in a few days if the men worked their hardest to get the factory going again, and Chiang Kai-shek was beaten, we would have a better time. He said a lot that I can't remember. At last I graduated, and worked with him in the city. A month ago he was transferred to Harbin, and I wanted like anything to go with him. But he said, "I'm working for people and so are you, not for an individual called Li. The people are everywhere, and everywhere they are watching to see if we are really working for them. If you do your work here well, you can consider you are doing your duty for the people; then our friendship will be worth while." I'm not one to cry, but at that I did shed tears. Not because I was so sorry to lose him, but because there really are people like that in the world. I haven't lived for nothing — I've seen a Communist like this. I like to tell people this story whenever I have the chance; and later one comrade said to me, there are plenty of Communists like that, plenty. Old Sun, with Communists like this, do you imagine things won't change? If they don't change, Heaven is really too blind."

"The world has changed, that's true; still. . . ." said Old Sun to himself. He did feel that things had changed, but he was not as optimistic as Wu. It was not easy for him to put his trust in anything.

He would curse himself for this conservatism, for his slow and cautious way of thinking. He hated himself for not being up to others, for not being up to Wu. However, he knew what his strong point was: once his entire trust had been given to anything he would work for it with all his might.

Wu Hsiang-t'ai went on: "There's been a change, a tremendous change. Things are going to get better and better—I'm convinced of it! Old Sun, in the past I didn't have faith in anything either, but after working with Department Head Li for a few months, I feel clearer about everything."

"You came across a good man" sighed Old Sun.

"I think Director Wang is pretty good too," whispered Wu.

"Frankly speaking, he is a good sort, and so are all the Communists—in the first place they aren't out to make money, in the second place they aren't out to grab power. Only he, he's just a little biased, and when you add that, that Seven and a Half into the bargain—to give an example: if Director Wang says we have the Manchukuo mentality, the men will take it; but if that fellow says it the men would secretly laugh at him, saying to each other, 'And you, what's your mentality?' About that past business of breaking the ice and salvaging the oil, Director Wang always says that it is to the credit of our whole group; but he says

it's to the credit of the Timeserver, and tells people to copy him! Him? He stinks for miles around. Are we to copy him?

"When I see the Yang brothers shirking work I feel angry. Well, in the past I slacked on their work and now they are slacking on ours. But there's no way of saying it. Sometimes I hint at it to that fellow, and he says 'Well, what can be done? They have the technical skill and we haven't. Can you go and do it?' Could I tell Director Wang about it? — There again, I don't know how he feels, and if he took offence, that would be the end of me. Here I am, forty-eight, it's not worth it."

"Wait a few more days, and when the time comes, speak out! At any rate things can't change for the worse — that's impossible." So Wu soothed and encouraged Old Sun.

"Say, it would be fine if your Department Head Li were to come. He wouldn't mind a flea in his ear!" When Old Sun said this they both laughed meaningly in the darkness. And after that they became fast friends.

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Chapter V

THE THIRD TIME that Director Wang came to Jade Girdle Lake Ch'en Tsu-t'ing followed his usual custom of giving him an account of all that had happened at the works, presenting everything in a somewhat prejudiced light. When he had finished Director Wang also followed his usual custom of spending some time deep in thought, not uttering a word for about half an hour, but simply pacing to and fro in the little room. He had this habit: he would concentrate entirely on a problem, and did not like to express any opinion until he had reached a solution. Once he had finished thinking and reached a decision, however, he would take firm and careful action accordingly. Each time that he paced up and down Ch'en Tsu-t'ing would be in an agony

of apprehension, as if awaiting some damning criticism, and not until Director Wang had finished giving him his incisive, apt, yet impassioned instructions did he calm down again. Only when Director Wang left Jade Girdle Lake did he feel that he had regained his authority among the workmen.

"Which are the best workers, which the worst?" asked Wang.

"The Second Team are not too bad, but the entire First Team are slack, especially Chang Jung-ts'ai, Tsao Wan-fa and Mao Wei-liang," said Ch'en Tsu-t'ing eagerly, watching the Director's expression.

"The best workers are Old Sun, Wu Hsiang-t'ai, Little P'an, Little Hu and Chu Tzu-chen," put in Liu Yüeh-hsüan.

"This evening we'll think it over and formulate some rules for working, then have a meeting to let everybody get their ideas straight first, and after that the best thing would be to wait until they voluntarily enforce the rules. If anybody makes trouble, then we will come down on him. But how can you have a democracy without discipline? The revolutionary workers spread all over China. How could they manage without discipline? Furthermore we must settle on the principle of rewards and punishments. Good workers should be praised at the time, and bad ones immediately corrected."

"The rest I may not have done, but I have given praise and blame as you say," said Ch'en Tsu-t'ing proudly.

"That's good!" Wang Yung-ming did not inquire further, but believed him immediately, and so praised him right on the spot.

Liu Yüeh-hsüan smiled to himself and stole a glance at Director Wang, thinking, "All you say is 'Good, good', but you don't look to see if he has really done well or just thinks he has." However, he did not dare say anything, being afraid that Ch'en Tsu-t'ing might attack him, and get him involved in a long argument. In his view Workers' Unions and the rest were all unnecessary: just let the machines start moving and everybody get on with the job and that would be enough.

The next day Wang Yung-ming felt that he ought to make himself more familiar with the situation, so he talked with some of the men.

The first was P'an Yü-shan. He was in the machine shed when he heard that Director Wang wanted him; he couldn't think of any reason, but his heart started beating fast, and by the time he had rushed up the two hundred and eighty steps he was scarcely able to breathe. Only when Director Wang started asking him about the state of affairs at the works and whether he had any views on the subject, did he calm down a little. Stringing together some of the expressions he had heard in class, he replied glibly: "Everything in the works is fine. Everybody is working hard. A Workers' Union has been established, the workers are particularly keen on uniting. We are all reforming our Manchukuo men-

talities, and we understand the principles of democracy."

Wang Yung-ming felt that he would not get anything out of P'an Yü-shan, so he sent for Little Hu. Little Hu was nineteen and still rather naive. He just tried to avoid answering, saying, "I'm a newcomer; I don't know the inside story. Everybody seems to be working well together now, and they all say it is quite unlike Manchukuo times." Finally he hung his head and begged, "I can't talk properly. Please, sir, ask the old hands instead."

When Wang Yung-ming, discouraged, nodded, he shot down the hill like a streak of smoke.

Chang Jung-ts'ai was sent for, but he hid himself and would not go up the hill. When Ch'en Tsu-ting knew this he was frantic, and went down himself to pull Chang by the sleeve and say: "You'll have to go up. Director Wang is not just anybody."

"You may dismiss me, but I won't go up," said Chang Jung-ts'ai despairingly. After a moment he looked up, and with a mixture of fear and defiance asked: "Chairman Ch'en, you've only just come, I haven't done anything to offend you; why do you pick on me? Is it because I shouldn't have gone fishing —"

Before he had finished speaking Ch'en burst out laughing: "You've got it wrong, quite wrong. Why should the Director trouble to pick on your faults? Didn't you see him send for other people too? It's just that he wants to get a clearer picture of the

situation. What are you afraid of? Never mind if you shouldn't have gone fishing. Doesn't the proverb say that a man who knows his faults and changes is a sage? Am I not always telling you the Communists are broadminded?"

But it was still with mixed feelings of fear and hate that Chang Jung-ts'ai climbed the hill. He blamed himself for not going with his elder brother to Ch'ang Ch'un at New Year's time, instead of staying here to get worked up for nothing.

"Can't be helped." So he hurried up to Wang Yung-ming. The Director was particularly polite to him, asked him how many years he had been driving and in what outfits he had worked while praising technicians' contribution to the country, he also encouraged him to work hard.

"Some people say the Chairman of the Workers' Union is inefficient and the committee members don't take any responsibility, so they want to have another election. Who do you think ought to be elected?" asked Wang Yung-ming, changing the subject.

"It would still be best to abide by the result of the first election," replied Chang Jung-ts'ai sullenly.

"Why?" asked Director Wang again.

Chang Jung-ts'ai thought for a second and then answered, still sulkily: "They're used to the job. Nobody else knows how to organise a Workers' Union." Director Wang did not say any more. As a result of this conversation Chang Jung-ts'ai felt that he himself really was a good-for-nothing, and

cursed himself, saying, "But there's nothing special about the Eighth Route either — they're nothing out of the ordinary."

After talking to seven or eight men in succession Wang Yung-ming realised that he was getting nowhere. It did not occur to him that there might be something wrong in his approach. He only thought that the workmen still had the old outlook and dared not speak out. His enthusiasm had already cooled when Liu Yüeh-hsüan suggested that he ought to have a talk with Old Sun.

Old Sun, for his part, when he saw Director Wang sending for the men one after another for a talk, thought: "Presently he will send for me too. Well, I shall say three things. I shall say, 'Director Wang, the best thing would be for you to come and live in the works.' Secondly I shall say, 'Director Wang, find us a good teacher, Chairman Ch'en is too busy.' And lastly I shall tell him the story about Department Head Li as told by Wu Hsing-t'ai. . . ." Thinking like this he smiled to himself. He waited and waited till mid-day passed. And it was afternoon, but no summons came for him. He began to lose heart. Then he questioned P'an Yü-shan and Little Hu again. When he found that they had only discussed irrelevant subjects he became completely disillusioned. Only when it was nearly time to quit work and he received a summons to go for a talk did he begin to feel excited again. Since this was a situation he had never experienced before he felt

a little ill at ease. When he went in to Wang he saw that the Director seemed very tired, frowning and looking at a copy book. He stood at attention, his two work-stained hands hanging at his sides.

"I hear that you are the only old hand who was here in the beginning when the power plant was built," Wang Yung-ming had motioned Old Sun to a seat, and started talking to him. As he spoke his tiredness seemed to vanish.

"Old Tung was here too in the beginning when the power plant was built. He is a local man, and he knows more about it." Schooled to be humble and wary, Old Sun still spoke in his accustomed slow manner.

Wang Yung-ming thought: "This old fellow is more experienced than the youngsters and even more worldly wise." He went on to ask questions about the workmen's life under the Japanese. When the breaking of the ice and salvaging the oil were mentioned, Old Sun resolutely gave all the credit to the whole group.

"That was entirely spontaneous on the part of the men. Believe me, it was no light job, and in the depth of winter too. How could two or three have managed it?"

Wang felt that after all this was a fair-minded old fellow. He nodded. Then he changed the subject: "Do you find the work in your team difficult?"

"Our team hasn't done much, so one can't talk about difficulty."

"I hear that the working spirit is not too good."

"It will improve gradually. When the slackers see that they have no advantage over the rest, then they will change their ways."

Wang Yung-ming was amused and thought to himself: "Just like my wife, a philosopher of the long-term school, the wait-and-see school." He suppressed a smile and asked: "Supposing they don't change their ways, what then?" He asked very casually, just wanting to puzzle the old man.

Old Sun felt that here was his opening; he ought to reveal the true state of affairs of the Workers' Union to Director Wang. All the ideas that he usually kept to himself now crowded to his tongue. However, growing up in the old society he had been oppressed and down-trodden all his life, and this had sapped his courage. Thus when the words reached the tip of his tongue, they retreated again. "If I still don't speak out, it will be unfair to the men," he chided himself, wanting to beat his breast, to force out all the words in his heart. When he stole a glance at Director Wang's careless attitude, his faults of conservatism and scepticism were strengthened. "He'd never believe me." This being the case he changed his mind. He only said tentatively: "Lazy people have a reason for their laziness, and wicked people have a reason for their wickedness — everybody has a reason for what he does. If you remove the reason for laziness, people stop being lazy. As a matter of fact technicians can't afford to be lazy,

for the simple reason that the machines won't let them. Again, we workmen are straight-forward people. We stick by our word; only we can't stand injustice. If you treat the men reasonably and ask them to risk their lives they will do it. The one thing they can't stand is injustice!"

Director Wang felt there was a good deal in what he said, but he thought: "It's no use talking to an old fellow like this who is so set in his ways; I said I would let Ch'en Tsu-t'ing be responsible for the Workers' Union, so I had better let him take the entire responsibility. He was a workman himself, and must be much closer to them than I am, knowing better what to do. Why should I keep everything in my own hands?" Having reached this decision he stopped worrying, turned and gave Old Sun a hearty slap on the back saying, "When you have any ideas, go and tell Chairman Ch'en. Workers should not be afraid to speak out boldly, so when you have anything to say, go to him."

This conversation left Old Sun feeling thoroughly disgruntled. "Whatever we say we can't get away from Chairman Ch'en! What's the use of talking!" Then he remembered how Wu Hsiang-t'ai had said: "When the time comes, speak out" — but it is still too early. His thoughts were far from happy. One moment he reproached himself, "What's become of your old energy? You'll soon be completely dumb!" The next moment he felt annoyed with Director Wang, the next he reproached himself again, the

next he regretted that he had not said more, contriving to make himself thoroughly upset that he could neither enjoy his food nor sleep soundly. Waking up in the middle of the night he turned his back on the others and heaved a long sigh.

After the Regulations for Work were formulated, sure enough, no one dared go fishing again or swimming, and there was less joking in working hours. But once the men were back in the dormitory there was no controlling them.

The first time Director Wang arrived Tung Chinkuei hurried down to the village and told his elder brother to catch some big fish and send them over. Afterward his brother understood what was wanted, and every ten days or so as soon as he caught sight of the lorry in the distance, he put down whatever he was doing on the farm and went to catch fish. Over the most trifling matters Tung would go to consult Director Wang, but each time either Director Wang snubbed him or else said coldly: "Go and discuss it with Chairman Ch'en." He felt that things had indeed changed — because now his old method of ingratiating himself failed to produce results. After some time he changed his tactics: he tried to get on good terms with Ch'en Tsu-t'ing by sending him fish and vegetables; but the very first time he did this he met with a rebuff. Ch'en Tsu-t'ing said to him, "Old Tung, don't be offended, The Eighth Route Army don't accept things from people, and I want to copy the good ways of the Eighth Route

Army and change my old feudalistic habits! So I can't possibly accept these."

Knowing what was in Ch'en's mind Tung immediately praised him: "You are up to the standard of the Eighth Route, you have made progress in the real fundamentals. As for me, with my dreadful feudalistic mentality I shall never catch up with you. I really must imitate you. Still, this can't be considered as sending gifts, it's only inviting you to eat something. My home is here and it's easy for us to catch fish. It doesn't cost anything. After all we are both workmen. And aren't all the workers in the world one family?"

Ch'en Tsu-t'ing, however, stuck to his principle. Afterward Tung did not dare send him any more presents.

Ch'en Tsu-t'ing thought only of his own good points without considering what his weaknesses were. His outlook being still quite backward in many respects, he was deceived by Tung's friendly overtures. In fact he thought Tung very progressive, quick in the uptake, able to understand anything as soon as he heard it, and then acting accordingly. Once he said to Tung with a sigh: "Tung, old chap, when I'm with you I feel I have someone congenial to talk with."

Tung assumed the embarrassed expression of a simple naive soul who hears himself praised. He said, "No, I'm a stupid clumsy fellow and can't talk

properly. I'm way behind my nephew who can write and express himself well."

Ch'en Tsu-t'ing pretended to be amazed and laughed heartily, saying, "No, you are neither stupid nor clumsy, and you are a good talker. In fact you are too —" His first intention was to say "You are too opportunistic," but he felt that would sound too unfriendly, so changed it to "You are too clever. Being stupid doesn't matter. Chairman Mao tells people to be simple and sincere. You ought to try to be more sincere. . . ." During these few months Ch'en Tsu-t'ing really felt that he had mastered a good many Communist principles. He was always talking about truth or Chairman Mao, and he would hold forth at great length. Some people were struck dumb by his torrent of words, others would not listen. In Tung's case he listened, but laughed to himself: "No wonder people make fun of him. He really is Seven and a Half Route."

One evening it poured with rain so that there was no class and Tung, his nephew Li Hsi-hsien and Little Sung were at a loose end in their house. Tung stood by the window for a while, sighed and said, "It really gets on one's nerves."

"Doesn't it!" said Little Sun, mistaking his meaning. "If not for this pouring rain we could stroll over to Director Lü's place, and that would be more interesting."

"I didn't mean the rain. I meant this set-up. The works doesn't seem like a works, and yamen

doesn't seem like a yamen. Goodness knows when things will become proper again, like they were in the old days."

"Are you afraid they may last several years?" asked Li Hsi-hsien biting, as if he had suddenly lost his temper.

"But you can't guarantee when exactly they will have to pack up," put in Little Sung.

"Wait and see. When the Sungari River is frozen over they will run like rabbits." Li Hsi-hsien's face was grey. Tung felt his nephew must have a reason for saying this, so he went on: "I wonder if Ma Yü-shan will be able to come back?"

"Who's Ma Yü-shan anyway?" said Li contemptuously.

"Which side is Ma Yü-shan actually on? That time he raided us I showed him my true colours, but it was no use. Doesn't he belong to one of the secret organisations?" Tung waited very absorbed to hear what the young man would answer. He suddenly felt very distressed to think that though he was the older of the two, of a senior generation, he had spent all his life in the mountain plain, and did not understand the important national currents outside.

"Wait and see who comes out on top. It won't be long now. I don't know the details about Ma Yü-shan, but by the look of him he should belong to the Nationalist Government, which collected quite a few brigands. I met his adjutant at a friend's house. Ma is really nothing special, with no power outside

Lu Tao and Jade Girdle Lake. There are plenty of others more powerful than he."

"Plenty?" Short, fat Tung leaned forward with an obsequious and envious expression, the loose flesh on his face sagging.

For the first time he felt that there was something strange about his nephew, and although he could not believe it, still he was worried: "How many of the important ones have you met? But you are still young, you mustn't go about following anyone you like! Better be content to make a quiet living. It's no good taking sides. If you got into trouble it would be the death of my sister. Another thing, if it's a question of stirring up trouble, let other people do it, then they can't pin anything on you."

Li Hsi-hsien was a spy sent by the Kuomintang, concealed in the hydro-electric plant waiting for an opportunity to make trouble; usually he simply utilised his uncle and Little Sung and other reactionary people to spread all sorts of defeatism and all kinds of rumours. Now seeing how nervous his uncle was he assumed an innocent look and comforted him with a smile: "Whatever can you be thinking of with this long rigmarole? I haven't been up to any tricks at all, just staying here very quietly and peaceably. You mind your business and I'll mind mine. Isn't that quiet and peaceful enough? After all, I'm not a fool. Do you suppose I would go looking for troubles?"

"All right, all right." Tung went on: "What I meant was this. Doesn't matter whom we're working for. We must always try to get on good terms with the powers that be, because only then will they trust us and only then will our jobs be secure."

After that Tung paid special attention to his nephew; but the latter behaved just as usual, talking and joking, asking his uncle this and that; only when the conversation turned to politics he assumed complete ignorance. So after a few days Tung forgot that evening's conversation.

To Tung's astonishment Li Hsi-hsien got on even better with Ch'en Tsu-t'ing than he himself. Ch'en Tsu-t'ing lent him various books to read. Tung thought, "It's really true that people who can read and write have a great advantage over the rest of us; I'm only a country bumpkin!" But then he reflected that after all the other was his nephew. It wouldn't do to be jealous of him, so he thought no more of it.

Before long Li Hsi-hsien was taking the workmen's classes in culture, three classes a week. By this means Ch'en Tsu-t'ing's burden was made much lighter. Li Hsi-hsien went to class very conscientiously, he also taught illiterate people how to read, taught those who could read to write sentences and compositions, and gave lessons in arithmetic. He understood the Eighth Route Army rules about making reports, so every three days he would give a report of his work to Ch'en Tsu-t'ing.

To begin with he only reported on the study group, but when he knew Ch'en better he would also tell him some of the gossip and criticism he had heard. After he had finished he would add some fabrications of his own. Within a month Jade Girdle Lake was in a ferment. Such rumours as "Mrs. Liu's Little Ling trod on Mrs. Chang's chicken and Mrs. Chang secretly went to accuse her to Chairman Ch'en", "When the Japanese retreated Liu Fu stole two cans of transformer oil, Chu Tzu-chen stole five big rolls of wire and Li Chan-ch'un stole a rifle." "Old Sun is a secret organisation leader and is bribing the young hands to be his followers; but Wu Hsiang-t'ai is jealous and secretly plans to make trouble for him." "Director Wang thinks highly of Chairman Ch'en, but badly of Liu Yüeh-hsüan", or again "Assistant Director Lü under Chairman Ch'en can only work, but is not allowed to speak", and "It's true that Ch'en is the absolute authority." Innumerable rumours like these flew abroad like willow seeds. As each rumour was spread, a couple of days later, sure as fate Chairman Ch'en would curse them all in class, as if each time there were a rumour they should all be held responsible. As a result of this, whenever anybody heard anything, he did not dare pass it on.

Some people felt resentful, some bewildered, some actually were injured by the rumours and became on bad terms with others. The work, however,

went on as usual, because everybody wanted the power plant to get going as soon as possible.

After so many years of oppression the North-eastern workers were good at protecting themselves. They knew these rumours must have been spread deliberately and they used a stony silence to guard against them. It was one result of the cruel government of the Japanese that people had lost the courage to investigate or probe into anything that might harm them.

The strangest thing was that by apparently tacit consent, whenever the men met any of Li Hsi-hsien's group, they kept their mouths shut.

On one occasion when Director Wang came to Jade Girdle Lake to inspect the work, he asked Ch'en Tsu-t'ing: "What kind of person is Li Hsi-hsien? Do you think it's wise to entrust him with one course?"

"It's the course on culture he's responsible for. I don't think that matters. I teach Politics myself," said Ch'en with complete confidence.

"These former puppet officials are by no means as simple as they look. I expect his family are still landlords, his Manchukuo mentality is bad enough." Director Wang kept shaking his head.

"They say his family does have a little land and is quite well off, but he studied and learned a trade and can do tough work; he really is a remarkable person. Recently he has made very rapid progress; still, if in future we find someone more suitable we

can easily change.” Ch’en Tsu-t’ing was much bolder now than when he first came, because he felt that he had proved his ability to supervise the works and head the workmen. This ability consisted of issuing orders, frowning sternly or even losing his temper, whereupon his instructions were always carried out. Even the most disrespectful men did not dare make jokes in his presence and he saw only meek faces.

“That chap certainly isn’t as simple as he looks,” put in Liu Yüeh-hsüan. “One day he was pacing up and down all by himself by those trees behind the office, looking very worried, as if he had something on his mind. I called out to him and immediately he produced a smile. Phew, it was quick work, he changed so fast, all his cares seemed blown away.” Recently Liu had grown tired of reporting things to Ch’en Tsu-t’ing, not because he had been injured by the rumours himself but because he felt Ch’en was so prejudiced he would practically never accept other people’s ideas, always saying, “You look at this much too simply” or “You go and work at your formulae.” In Liu’s view Li Hsi-hsien was even worse than Tung. Although he had mentioned this once or twice to Ch’en, the latter ignored him. Now that Director Wang was here he mentioned it again. Immediately Ch’en Tsu-t’ing turned on him, “Suppose he were a bad person, he wouldn’t show his worry on the road. Why should he let so many people see him? People who have studied often have such strange habits, like strolling about or looking at the moon;

that's not the point at all. But as far as his attitude goes, he really is cultured. It doesn't matter whether he's talking to superiors or inferiors. He is always polite, always cultured. I hear the workmen respect him very much."

"You can't judge just by outward appearances," said Director Wang to Ch'en Tsu-t'ing. "Beware of those who may have daggers in their smiles." Then turning to Liu he said, "Liu Yüeh-hsüan, you are a good judge of people, but you don't like to take responsibility — that's selfish. Still, we may as well let you concentrate on your machines and make a good technician of you. But you ought constantly to tell him your views. You two ought to cooperate very closely together."

When Director Wang went back to Lu Ming River he talked over the affairs of Jade Girdle Lake with Manager Li and Lü Liu-yi. They often talked late into the night when everybody else had gone to bed. This was because during the day they were very busy and all sorts of people kept calling on them, so they had no chance to exchange opinions.

"It's not a simple business at Jade Girdle Lake." Seeing that Lü Liu-yi was dozing off, he gave her a gentle nudge.

Plump Liu-yi had fallen asleep, lying back across her chair, breathing regularly. On her round white face the long black lashes over her closed eyes formed two jet-black arcs; her small nose was up in the air, her mouth pouting. She was the comparatively cour-

ageous type among the pretty gentle women south of the Yangtze River. Only when Wang Yung-ming had nudged her three times did she wake up.

"What problems have cropped up?" asked Manager Li puffing at his cigarette. "Difficult. 'The mountain's high, the Emperor far away'; really 'Although the whip is long it cannot reach them!'" He liked to use a jumble of quotations. This was his way: in making purchases or spending money he was shrewd and economical, but in questions of politics and organisation he was not in the least interested, and if he did join in a discussion he made no relevant contribution.

"It's not a question of serious problems. Only rumours are spread, and attempts to stir up trouble keep cropping up."

"What — aren't they all workmen there?" asked Lü Liu-yi.

"Without an experienced cadre there it really is difficult to manage the place, yet I can't very well move over there to live."

"Let me go," said Lü-yi earnestly.

"It would be fine if you did, only. . . ."

"Only I don't use my brain? I haven't strong enough class feeling?" she asked seriously.

"Nonsense," he protested, to show that he had always thought highly of her. "That used to be a bandits' hideout. Although it's better now, they're not entirely wiped out, so that it's not a good place for women comrades."

"When work is involved, how can you think of things like that! And anyway there are armed guards there." After a slight pause she went on, "I'd like to have a job of my own somewhere, to test if I really have any ability or not." She had several times mentioned that she would like to work on a different job from her husband. Here she was seriously proposing it again.

He did not want to argue with her, so he replied curtly: "Well, the work here needs you." And added, "Ch'en Tsu-t'ing is really not bad; he's reliable on the political side, only he has no experience."

"According to you Ch'en Tsu-t'ing is the only reliable one there, none of the others are reliable," she said, putting her finger on his weak point.

"Don't split hairs. He has been tested. I've heard that Wu Hsiang-t'ai is a new party member, but I haven't had references for him yet."

"Though I haven't had much to do with Wu Hsiang-t'ai I think he is a sound person, and steady. What do you think?" asked Li.

"You mustn't underestimate Ch'en Tsu-t'ing," said Director Wang, defending him. "He is energetic and capable. Although he does everything in a straight-forward way, still everybody is afraid of him."

"How prejudiced you are! You only like people as impatient as yourself and as active. You can't spare yourself; but always have to supervise everything personally."

"If one leaves everything to subordinates, isn't that just the same as the old bureaucracy?"

Liu-yi was unable to refute him, but in her heart she disagreed. She kept looking forward to the day when she would leave Wang Yung-ming and do a job of work on her own.

Because he was overworked Wang Yung-ming was growing thinner and thinner. One day Manager Li told him that he was buying some calcium carbide, tungsten and wire, which were not only good but cheap, and all the people there who understood such things and had seen them had approved. But Director Wang wanted to cross the river and see for himself. Li slapped his chest, and said, "No need to go. If I've made a bad buy I'll resign from my job." Still Director Wang paid no attention. Although he already had a headache he insisted on crossing the river to see the goods. When he saw them he was completely satisfied, and ordered payment to be made at once. On the way home he was drenched in a storm of rain, and ran up a high fever. When he was sent to hospital and had been examined he was found to have scarlet fever. Liu-yi stayed by his side. Because the fever was extremely high he was unconscious for three days and nights. Sometimes he muttered incoherently, sometimes he shouted wildly: "The transformer is on fire!" "Stop him, the spy, stop him!" By the time his temperature dropped he was appallingly thin and Liu-yi too was worn out, her face ghastly white. The day after his

fever left him Ch'en Tsu-t'ing heard of his illness and hurried from Jade Girdle Lake to see the invalid. When he saw how thin and weak Director Wang had grown he scarcely recognised him. He sat very gently on the side of the bed, lowered his head and was almost moved to tears.

"Who told you to come?" asked Wang Yung-ming in a weak voice.

"I came to town to buy something for the baby, and happening to pass your office went to call on you. They told me you were ill. Since I was passing this way I came to see you," lied Ch'en.

"I have the doctor to look after me, but if you leave Jade Girdle Lake who is to look after the works?" Wang reproved him, obviously not believing his tale.

"It doesn't matter. Assistant Director Lü is at the works," said Ch'en. But he chuckled inwardly, thinking, "A lot of use he is as assistant director." As a matter of fact he had entrusted all the factory business to Liu Yüeh-hsüan and Li Hsi-hsien. In his view the more warm-hearted and reliable of the two was Liu Yüeh-hsüan, the more able and the one he admired more was Li Hsi-hsien.

"How is everything going on in the works the last few days?" asked Wang Yung-ming feebly.

"Nearly done. There are still a few small items missing; only the stator is still wet. That reminds me, Wu Hsiang-t'ai, Liu Fu and Liu Yüeh-hsüan are all in favour of drying it; but Yang Fu-t'ien has

ignored their suggestion completely. When it comes to electricity they ought to know best."

"Don't be in a hurry. Wait till I've seen it. I shall leave the hospital the day after tomorrow and the evening of the next day I shall come to Jade Girdle Lake."

Liu-yi frantically made signs to Ch'en Tsu-t'ing. The latter understood at once and changed his tune, saying, "It's still early to think of starting up the machines. The switchboard hasn't been repaired yet, and even if it's decided to dry the stator, it won't be for another ten days or so. You'd better rest a few more days, your health is most important."

Actually Wang had already sat up. This was the first time he had sat up since his illness. When he thought of the work, of the responsibility entrusted to him by the Party, he became restless and tense. Repairs had taken three months. Now that it was nearly time to generate power he could not help being excited. He was considering what they should have to be specially on their guard against in generating power, and how the man should be assigned. He kept turning over in his mind problems which he could not resolve, until his head reeled and he fell back unconscious. Liu-yi was so frightened she did not know what to do, and could only wring her hands; but Ch'en Tsu-t'ing immediately called the doctor, and after an injection of adrenalin he slowly recovered consciousness.

Chapter VI

THE LAST FEW DAYS because the repairs of the machines were nearing completion all the workers were in high spirits. The closer they were to the end of their task, the harder they worked.

Lü Ping-chen was in high spirits just like the workmen, seeing that the generator was practically ready to generate electricity. This kind of happiness can only be appreciated by surgeons who have successfully completed a dangerous operation, or generals who see victory in sight, or farmers about to harvest their crops. But his happiness differed in one respect from that of the workmen — he lacked the enthusiasm that comes from working in a group. Because in the past he had studied on his own, later on had worked on his own, and now was happy all on his own.

He had a talk with the two Yang brothers, and they decided to try out the action of the machines. Although Ch'en Tsu-t'ing informed him of Director Wang's plan to come and watch the trial, he paid no attention, thinking to himself with a contemptuous smile, "And what if he did come!" However what he said was, "Once we have generated electricity we will light up the road to welcome him." Yang Fu-t'ien was also in favour of an immediate trial.

But Old Sun, Liu Yüeh-hsüan and Wu Hsiang-t'ai were worried about the stator which was still damp, Liu Yüeh-hsüan in particular, who urged the others to express their opinion. Wu Hsiang-t'ai felt that since he was a member of the Communist Party he should not be afraid of trouble or of being snubbed, so taking his courage in both hands he went to Yang Fu-t'ien and suggested that the stator ought perhaps to be dried out. Fu-t'ien smiled scornfully and said in bad Chinese, "What kind of electric science is this? Manchukuo electric science I suppose!"

Yang Fu-t'ien took charge of the switch board, Yang Shen-t'ien of the speed of the water wheel and Lü Ping-chen of the distributor, while Ch'en Tsu-t'ing was to see whether the sound seemed normal or not. All the workers were looking on, their faces tense with excitement. They were assigned to report on conditions on the control room, machine shed, cellar and even the transformer station. At eight o'clock in the evening Lü Ping-chen went solemnly

up to the steering wheel of the water wheel and raised the lever. The water wheel started to turn; the speed regulator, the generator and the oil hydraulic press started moving too. The thin bending copper pipes attached to the machines also began to vibrate beautifully and a smooth chugging sound was once more heard in the machine shed. When the old power plant hands heard what they had not heard for over a year, they were inexpressibly happy — Yes, they had heard famous ballad singers, and Mei Lan-fang's opera; they had heard the village girls singing folk songs with their clear voices, and the sweet hum of their own children singing; they had also heard the pure notes of the forest birds and the low gentle murmur of the spring breeze ruffling the surface of Jade Girdle Lake. But now all these appeared ridiculous, insignificant, absolutely not to be compared with the fine sound of the machines moving in the machine shed today — beautiful!

Everybody waited breathlessly.

"150." said Yang Fu-t'ien.

"150." the workers passed on.

"300."

"300."

Minute by minute the electric pressure mounted slowly: 500, 1,000, 2,000, 3,000; and the larger the figures the greater the men's confidence in their success, until gradually their tense and watchful vigilance began to diminish. When the pressure had mounted to over 3,000 Yang Fu-t'ien's throat felt

dry. But there was no doubt at all in his mind as to the success of his efforts, so he stopped calling out figures, and increased the pressure even faster than before. He increased it right up to 7,000, and then felt that was enough. Just as he wanted to stop and bring it down he heard someone calling in a hushed voice from the machine shed: "What! It's smoking!" And almost immediately people started hurrying about and there was the sound of voices and footsteps. Word was sent round: "Stop it at once!" Lü Ping-chen stopped his distributor too fast. Although in actual fact the machines had already stopped, it was, however, too late; the electric generator was on fire. Very soon from the cloud of thick black smoke crimson flames darted out. A scene of confusion followed. Ch'en Tsu-t'ing hurried up the hill to order the guards to organise small teams at the top and at the foot of the hill to preserve order; Old Sun directed the men to carry water to put out the fire, while Tung started shouting frantically in the crowd. Buckets, poles and basins were all used to fetch water; some of the men were pale with fright and trembled. Chu Tzu-chen grabbed two cannon shells, one in each hand, filled them with water, and as he climbed the iron ladder to empty them into the dense smoke he was crying as if his mother had died.

Wu Hsiang-t'ai climbed up the iron frame which encircled the generator, in order that he might tell them where the slowly brought water might most effectively be thrown. He used two small strips of

iron girder to fasten on the small holes of the exciter, thus making a little bridge; and on this precarious bridge he stood, taking over the water that was brought. If he lost his balance, he would fall into the empty trough outside the exciter which was muffled in dense smoke. This courage, skill and recklessness of his were most effective in fighting the fire. Old Sun, Liu Yüeh-hsüan and Ch'en Tsu-t'ing followed his lead, each setting up a small bridge against the iron framework round the exciter to battle with the flames.

Wu Hsiang-t'ai let himself be exposed to the smoke too long until he became dizzy, lost his balance and fell into the trough. Li Chan-ch'un, who had just carried in water, took off his belt and lowered it down for Wu Hsiang-t'ai to take a firm grip of one end, then he and Tsao Wan-fa hauled on the other end; but it took more than a quarter of an hour to get him up, and by then the soles of his feet had long since been scorched red by the hot metal. Li Chan-ch'un laid him on the ground and poured cold water on his face; then he lost no time in climbing up to take his place. After Wu Hsiang-t'ai had lain there for a time his head became a little clearer. He stood up, rubbed some oil on his soles, went and took over the bucket from Old Liu who was panting, sweating and praying to Buddha, and went to the river for water. His shoes were lost, and the scorched soles of his feet caused him agony as he walked over the stones, but he paid no attention

to the pain. At this juncture he, like all the others, had only one thought in his head: they must save the machines which they had repaired at such great cost to themselves from the cruel jaws of the fire demon. Although the stream was just at the foot of the generating plant, they lacked fire extinguishing equipment, so that the fire raged from half past eight to one o'clock before they were finally able to put it out. When the fire was extinguished the men did not disperse. All of them gathered in the machine shed as if by tacit consent. The electric lights on the city power line lit up the smoky blackness of the machine shed, and from the chief engineer down to the workmen hung their heads with grief. The workmen's happy enthusiasm and Yang Fu-t'ien's arrogance had alike been destroyed by the fire.

Sick at heart and tired as he was, Old Sun could not help shedding tears over the incident. He felt a strange ache in his heart, and wondered to himself: "Disaster, always disaster! They escaped being destroyed by the Kuomintang only to be destroyed in the fire. Whose fault was it? My fault? My fault was not to tell the Director plainly the men's problems. But if I had told him would that have stopped the fire? No, only I'm to blame for not asking Yang Fu-t'ien properly to dry out the stator. . . ." So he was a prey to worry and remorse. By this time Wu Hsiang-t'ai was finding the pain in his hands and feet unbearable, so he soaked his feet in a bucket of cold water. Old Sun hastily went over to forbid him,

dried his red and blistered soles for him, and rubbed on ointment. Then thoroughly exhausted as he was he went from man to man to examine their burns, and applied ointment to all those who were hurt. It looked as if he were the only one with any energy left; whereas actually he was more tired than anyone else and more grieved. When he looked at those sad, crest-fallen Yang brothers, whose negligence had caused such great damage, he trembled with anger.

Chu Tzu-chen leant his head against the thick pipe of the oil pump and could not help crying aloud. All the men felt it impossible to hide their grief and bitterness any longer. Some sobbed out loud, some shed tears silently, some put their arms tightly round their neighbours' shoulders for comfort. By now Assistant Director Lü, who had hitherto always preserved a pose of cultured elegance, was also completely miserable. His face was covered with black smudges from the smoke and oil, and one of his sleeves was torn. The workmen's grief moved him: this was the first time he had ever been aware of the workmen's sincerity, their love for the fruit of their labour, their love for the machines. He too shed tears, partly because he regretted that he had worked so hard these three months for nothing, and partly because he shared the workmen's sorrow.

When the Yang brothers had finished examining the damage done to the generator, and climbed down again, they were as aghast as they had been on August 15th the previous year; but they still main-

tained their Bushido pose, standing with chests puffed out.

This period of misery lasted for half an hour, while Ch'en Tsu-t'ing conferred softly with Lü Ping-chen. Then Lü Ping-chen stood up and made an announcement: "It's already past midnight; you had better go home now. For the time being none of the machines are to be touched and no one is to leave the works. We will wait quietly for Director Wang to come and give us instructions."

A pale crescent moon emerged now to watch the men, like a funeral procession, dragging with heavy steps up the hill.

The next morning Ch'en Tsu-t'ing issued an order that no one might take a holiday or leave the works, then he, Lü Ping-chen and Liu Yüeh-hsüan went into town to make a clean breast of the affair to Director Wang. Because Wu Hsiang-t'ai was badly hurt he had to go into town for treatment, so they hired a cart to Hsi Liang Chen where they could take the train.

When Director Wang saw them, he first sent a man to take Wu Hsiang-t'ai to the hospital. After hearing a detailed report from Lü Ping-chen and Ch'en Tsu-t'ing, he lowered his head in thought, not saying a word. After some twenty minutes he spoke rather slowly: "The Number One Generator can be repaired, isn't it so?"

The other three did not understand at first why he should ask this. Lü Ping-chen thought to him-

self, "Well, what if it can be repaired; we shall still have to go to prison, shan't we?" Ch'en Tsu-t'ing did not dare answer, but Liu Yüeh-hsüan took courage and said, "It can be repaired!"

"If you feel confident you can repair the Number One Generator, go back and draw up a plan of repair. In another day or so I will come out again." Then he encouraged them: "Never mind. We have destroyed one machine in the fire, but we can still repair the other. It's always from our mistakes that we gain experience!"

When they heard this they felt relieved. They were so moved that for a moment no one could speak.

Then Ch'en Tsu-t'ing, wiping his eyes, said, "Since the People's Government is so kind, when we go back we don't mind going without sleep and without pay, or eating badly, but we shall get the Number One Machine repaired."

The three of them each contributed some money to buy some eggs and biscuits for Wu Hsiang-t'ai, after which they returned at once to Jade Girdle Lake.

Wang Yung-ming went to the headquarters to report the burning of the machine. Secretary General Li, Commissioner Ho and Political Worker Ch'ien were all present. Ho asked detailed questions as to the situation at the works and the progress of the repairs. But Ch'ien gave his attention to the people at the works, the workers' living conditions

and the leadership of the Workers' Union; and Wang Yung-ming gave true answers to all their questions. First Ch'ien approved Wang Yung-ming's method of dealing with the situation: to repair the other machine.

After considering the question for some time, they agreed that this fire probably resulted from a technical error. In conclusion Ch'ien said gravely to Wang Yung-ming: "We all know how hard you work, and your work has shown results. First we must admit that our local committee has concentrated on suppressing bandits, punishing landlords and dividing land, with the result that we have given little attention to problems in the town, especially to the electric industry." Ch'ien had a scar on his right eye, and whenever he talked his right eye twitched, giving him an odd appearance. He spoke slowly and in a soft tone of voice, but very sternly. "But shouldn't you reconsider your method of work? For instance, you told Ch'en Tsu-t'ing to look after everything by himself, without depending on the strength of the whole group. Do you think this is right or not? Wu Hsiang-t'ai is a party member, an excellent worker, but you did not trust him and did not learn the conditions of the workmen through him. In the work of land reform in the villages the same mistake is made: the first thing our men do when they get there is to look for keen workers, and thereafter they trust these few keen workers implicitly to look after everything. In villages where

these keen workers are well chosen there aren't many difficulties; but choosing by first impressions does not produce many genuine enthusiasts. It's like thrashing wheat: the good wheat always sinks to the bottom, while the husks and dust always rise to the top. People who don't know how to thrash and don't know the direction of the wind may thrash for half a day, but the husks and wheat are still in one heap, the husks covering up the wheat." Gesturing with his hand to illustrate the action his cigarette ash was scattered everywhere. He was like so many able leaders, apt, clear, sincere in speech; so that the cadres could not help agreeing with him. "You have a very strong sense of principle, a very strong sense of responsibility, only you lack one thing which Chairman Mao is constantly telling us of: following the way of the masses. . . . To trust the masses, to rely on them, naturally this does not mean not to lead them. . . . If you want to repair the other machine successfully, you must make use of your first experience of failure. . . ."

After Wang Yung-ming had received his superiors' instructions and criticism he planned to go and live at Jade Girdle Lake for a time, in order to gain a deeper understanding of conditions there. But because he had to buy some materials (certain indispensable mica), it was necessary for him to make a trip to Harbin first, and thus he was delayed for another two days. By now industry in Harbin was improving, and when news of victory was brought

from the front, the people of Harbin declared they must strengthen the rear in order to support the front line; and in such an atmosphere his interest and enthusiasm in the electric industry received additional stimulus. The important thing, however, was that in Harbin he heard a speech which affected his thinking. He was staying in the government hostel where he met an old schoolfellow with whom he talked for two nights.

Although the first train for Lu Ming River did not leave till ten o'clock Wang Yung-ming woke up at half past four. He had been sleeping even less than usual the last few days. Whenever he thought of his weaknesses he felt ashamed and sad, but when he realised that he had the courage to conquer these weaknesses he felt stimulated and happy, and his self-confidence increased. Probably every Communist has experienced this feeling. In fact he is experiencing it all the time. And this kind of experience it is that enables them constantly to improve their political understanding. It is also the chief reason for the daily improvement in their character.

"Tsai Chieh, wake up." He shook his old schoolfellow. "After worrying so long I realise I have been a bureaucrat all the time!"

Tsai Chieh opened his eyes, and when he saw how excited, yet in earnest, his friend was, he was bewildered and said: "What's up?"

Wang Yung-ming sat up, his eyes wide with excitement, completely absorbed in his own problem.

"Yesterday Political Worker Li of the Northeast Board gave a speech in the staff meeting, and one part dealt with bureaucracy. He said there are five manifestations of bureaucracy. Ah, I've been guilty of the fifth kind!"

"You do everything yourself, and you don't stand on your dignity in the least, how can you be considered a bureaucrat?"

"Listen to me, the fifth kind is a radical leader who insists that his order must be carried out and also keeps all power in his hands. The criticism so many comrades usually make of me was apparently correct after all! I'm conscientious all right, but I don't let anything out of my hands, I haven't the strength to trust the people! I can't use other people's ability, I don't make a careful investigation myself — I treat the whole group with suspicion, but put all my trust in one person." He went on very sadly, but quietly, "When I first became aware of this serious defect in my character, I felt dreadful! Tsai Chieh, don't you agree, I'm not a good member of the Party? Because of me, because I made a mess of my job, the Party has suffered this great loss!"

Tsai Chieh realised that his friend's voice was trembling, and comforted him with all respect and sincerity: "No, you are a good Party member, Yung-ming; the fact that you can recognise your weakness and are brave enough to correct it, shows you are a

good Party member. Have you forgotten what Comrade Liu Shao-ch'i said? Communists aren't dropped down from heaven, they come from the old society. For this reason we are bound to have all kinds of faults; this is unavoidable. But we must get rid of those faults. . . ."

Wang Yung-ming was silent for a long time, then he said with feeling to Tsai Chieh: "You really are my good colleague. When we are apart you often write to me to keep me up to scratch, and now that I need encouragement you have restored my self-confidence!"

Before going up to Jade Girdle Lake, Wang Yung-ming went to the hospital to have a talk with Wu Hsiang-t'ai. Wu Hsiang-t'ai's feet were inflamed and his temperature was very high. He talked incoherently, but kept warning Director Wang to be on his guard against Li Hsi-hsien. And toward the end he said, "There are plenty of good chaps at the works, plenty. . . ." Wang Yung-ming would not let him tire himself too much, and after calming him down he left. When he reached the works he found that they had not started on repairs. Lü Ping-chen was making an investigation on his own, but no one else dared touch anything. For the time being Wang Yung-ming did not bring up the question of repairs, he just looked round, here, there and everywhere, and chatted with whomever he met. After two days he felt just as before that he was not getting anywhere. The workmen still did not dare talk

frankly to him. He called two meetings to discuss with the whole group how to repair the Number One Generator, but nobody made any suggestions.

That evening he was thinking sadly to himself: "Why don't the workmen rally round? Is it because they're afraid of me? Because they hate the engineers? Dislike Ch'en Tsu-t'ing? If I transfer Ch'en Tsu-t'ing to another job, who could take his place? Wu Hsiang-t'ai is still in hospital. Another thing, what are Ch'en Tsu-t'ing's faults anyway?" He really did not know. In his cubicle he could think to no conclusion, so he went outside. It was the end of the lunar month and there was no moon; on four sides the towering hills merged with the black sky. The transformer station on the west of the slope stood by the faintly glimmering river, and the machine shed seemed a huge, tall grey monster lurking silently there. Looking at this solitary, lifeless black earth and sky he felt rather angry. If the generator had not been destroyed in the fire, this mountain top would be lit up and this corner would resound with the clatter of the machines. He turned round. There seemed to be some lights on the north side of the slope. One would judge by the dimness of the lights that there was no more than a tiny village there — this was the power plant's only neighbour, Three Surnames Village. He passed the office, walked under the willows, and heard a child crying which he guessed must be Ch'en Tsu-t'ing's; faint yellow rays of lamp light issued from the windows of all

the small houses, showing that people had not yet gone to bed.

From the dormitory a burst of laughter could be heard, and with his curiosity aroused Wang Yung-ming walked in that direction. Not wanting to interrupt the men's enjoyment he just peeped through the window.

The two kang were filled with people, some lying, some sitting, some leaning against the wall; but because the lamplight was very dim he could not make out who they were. A youngster was standing on the floor imitating someone else. No doubt, it was because he had given a good imitation that everyone had laughed.

"P'an Yü-shan, you're still not too good at imitations. In the old days my Tiger could take off anybody and make it seem more true to life than the real person." Wang Yung-ming recognised that slow accent; it was Old Sun speaking.

"That's a strange thing to say; how could it be more true to life than the real person?"

"Say, Old Sun, tell us some more about your Tiger," another youngster said. It was a fat man's voice, and sounded like Li Chang-ch'un. "Do you all remember? In February when Old Sun told us the story of Tiger's cruel death, it somehow stirred everybody up to break the ice and protect the machines and salvage the oil. Do now tell us another story about Tiger, so that we can find some other job

to work at. These last few days, since the machine was burnt, we've really been bored to tears."

"No, thanks, not for me. What other job do you want? Breaking the ice and salvaging the oil was all by our sweat, but the Timeserver got all the credit for it. What should we do that again for?" asked someone angrily.

P'an Yü-shan took this opportunity to imitate Ch'en Tsu-t'ing's actions and speech in class: "You must all learn from Old Tung; he was the leader in breaking the ice and salvaging the oil and all the rest of it. Some people laugh at him for being a timeserver, but there would be no harm in having more timeservers like him. Is he not loyal to the proletariat? When he worked for the Japs, was he not forced to it?"

Again there was a roar of laughter, and someone shouted, "It really is Seven and a Half Route to the life!"

When Wang Yung-ming heard this he unconsciously gritted his teeth and said softly to himself: "Could this really have happened?" Then he held his breath and listened again; everybody was talking together of incidents that happened when they broke the ice and salvaged the oil. P'an Yü-shan gave another imitation of the official questioning him and Old Sun as to which was the most important part of the machines, and how Old Sun tricked him. And thinking of the stupidity of the officials everybody laughed again. After this someone referred to the

business of Old Sun stripping himself naked to get into the water and how Mrs. Liu and Mrs. Chang fled in confusion, and once again the room resounded with laughter. Wang Yung-ming standing outside did not laugh, not because he did not think it funny, but because he felt something deeper than amusement — he was moved. He was moved to admiration of this old Chinese workman who had maintained the good tradition of the proletariat, this old man who had shown himself capable of such self-sacrifice, this obscure hero who had doggedly worked on in spite of difficulties. At the same time he was aghast that for over four months he had failed to realise the truth about Old Sun.

“Old Sun, if an old rooster like you gets frozen stiff and has no children it is your own fault. Who knows what guts you have? Yet you don’t believe me when I say you’re going to have troubles all your life. I hear that fellow is soon going to be promoted to be Business Manager, while you are still living in the big pigsty. If you ever come to the top I’ll take off my head and hand it to you!” Again it was Li Chan-ch’un’s voice.

“You are all so small-minded; you can’t even tolerate a nut. What are you doing all this shouting about? It’s surely not as bad as in the puppet regime. Isn’t it better than when the Nationalist Government officials were here? A machine has been burnt, but we don’t go to prison for it. They only want us to go on with repairs. Could this have hap-

pened in the past, could it? Never mind what the Timeserver is up to, or Seven and a Half Route." Old Sun was leaning against the window-ledge, speaking absent-mindedly as if he were thinking of something else.

"Of course there's no comparison," said someone from the corner. "But that was Manchukuo, and today it's the People's Government. To talk of democracy, one should have democratic ways. But when the Timeserver grabs power and Seven and a Half helps him, how can you call it democracy?"

"If he wants to grab power, let him. What does it matter to you?"

"Well, I was only talking. Who cares about all that?"

Wang Yung-ming was so angry with himself for using unsuitable people that his blood started boiling so that he could not stand still another moment, like a ball pumped full of air which will bounce if you so much as touch it. He did not listen any more, but left the dormitory. He paced up and down under the apricot and willow trees.

"Anyone who lets himself get separated from the people becomes like a blind man, a deaf man or a fool." This profound teaching kept repeating itself in his mind. Only late at night, when his guard had been looking everywhere for him, did he go back to his room.

The next morning he seized an opportunity to talk to Old Sun, and spoke very frankly: "Chair-

man Mao tells us to look for teachers among the workers, peasants, soldiers and labourers, but I have not followed his instructions properly. At Ta Sheng I found teachers, but they were not good ones; and since they became teachers they have stopped looking for teachers themselves." Wang Yung-ming spoke with such manifest sincerity that he made a deep impression on the other. "You are my best teacher; everybody at Jade Girdle Lake likes you. I have been here over four months and just discovered this. I might as well be blind! But still, we mustn't be afraid of making mistakes; if we are mistaken we can change. In the past I used the wrong people, so that everybody felt resentful; now I know it, and if I still don't change they will feel even more resentful. If I change, everybody will like me; they must be able to like me. . . ."

Old Sun remembered how Wu Hsiang-t'ai had said, "When the time comes, speak out." He felt that such an opportunity had arisen, so with deep feeling he clasped Wang Yung-ming's hand in his own large work-roughened palm, and proceeded to tell him everything that he had been concealing in his heart. At last he said: "It's not your fault; it's my fault for being so conservative that I didn't dare speak up. In the past there was a barrier between us. It's just as well the fire burnt the machines and has also burnt down this barrier!"

But as for heading the Workers' Union he was very unwilling. Wang Yung-ming argued with him

and persuaded him, and said that later they would have another election and abide by the vote. Finally, over the question of repairs, he asked Old Sun's advice. Old Sun thought for a moment, and then said: "At noon I'll summon the others and see what plan the group can think of. If we don't consult them nothing can be done successfully. Why? 'Three fools make one wise man.' When there are a number of people, they are bound to think of a good idea. Another thing, the work depends on the whole group. If they make the decision themselves, how can they fail to carry it out?"

"There's no hurry," said Wang Yung-ming. "Don't make any plans yet, but go back first and discuss it with the others. We'll have the election for the Workers' Union, and when the new officers are elected and the unpopular people have been changed, only then will the men say what they think. What do you say to that?"

Old Sun agreed. For the first time he felt that the Eighth Route Army's methods and procedures were clear, moderate and above all realistic.

Following this Wang Yung-ming talked with many of the men, the main theme of his conversation being criticism of himself, and that took many forms. In the Workers' Union re-elections, after a whole day and night of discussion in the big meeting and small groups, they were ready for the actual voting to begin. The result of the election was that Old Sun was elected Chairman, Wu Hsiang-t'ai

Organisation Chief, Liu Fu Welfare Chief, and Ch'en Tsu-t'ing Propaganda Chief.

When Li Chan-ch'un saw all these good people elected he said with delight: "Of the four I voted for three. It ought to have been like this before!"

Even Old Liu, who was usually most indifferent to what went on, nodded his head now and said: "This is about right."

Chapter VII

WHEN WU HSIANG-T'AI heard that the other generator was to be repaired, ignoring the doctor's warning and without even troubling to take his bedding, he left the hospital by stealth and made the journey back to Jade Girdle Lake by horse-carriage, train and mule-cart. In order that his feet should not hurt when he walked, he was not wearing shoes but had fastened a thick wad of cotton under the soles of his feet. Even so when he reached home he found climbing the hill more difficult than an ascent to heaven. This was the day that the Workers' Union had called a meeting of all its members to discuss how to repair the Number One Generator. Now they were just in the middle of a heated discussion as to how to punish the Yang brothers; some advocated dismissing

them, others tying them up and sending them to the government for punishment. As they spoke of the Yang brothers who had allied themselves with the Japanese, everybody naturally started complaining and talking of the two brothers' faults. Old Sun as chairman allowed everyone to speak freely. Although this was only the second time he had taken the chair at a general meeting, still his honesty, patience and tolerance encouraged the men to say exactly what they felt. The discussion was at its liveliest when Wu Hsiang-t'ai came in looking exhausted. He was a strongly built fellow of medium height, with dark skin, big eyes, thick eyebrows and his head shaved so that it had a bluish tint. When he frowned or was silent he looked stern and forbidding, but once he smiled people found him both amusing and likeable. His smile always pleased the women, but since his wife died he had not remarried. Whenever he had money he would treat the men to a good meal and buy toys and cakes for the children and women, so he could never afford to marry.

Wu Hsiang-t'ai's return was completely unexpected. When the men saw him they forgot for a time their anger at the machines being burnt and became happy instead, as if by tacit consent all moving toward him. Old Sun, too, forgot that there was a meeting in progress for the discussion of serious matters. He went up to Wu Hsiang-t'ai and took him by the shoulders as if he were a

brother who had been away for a long time. He loved and admired him deeply; but he did not say a word. Really, what could he say? These ten days that he had been away the power plant had changed so much that he did not know where to begin. And when the workmen saw Wu Hsiang-t'ai's feet and remembered his courage and self sacrifice in putting out the fire, their hearts brimmed over with admiration and sympathy. They all looked at his feet in the cotton, and some stroked his feet.

When they had settled down a little and gone back to their seats, Li Chan-ch'un dragged Wu Hsiang-t'ai into a corner and told him in detail all that had happened in the last ten days. In conclusion he inclined his head toward Tung Chin-kuei and said, "It's no good; he's not the favourite any more." Then stealthily pointing in Ch'en Tsu-t'ing's direction: "These days he's much quieter!"

After this interruption nobody had any suggestions to put forward, and Old Sun pressed them: "How should we repair the machines? Go on, speak up; and how should we deal with them. . . ."

"Can't think of anything else. . . ."

"That about covers it."

After another deep silence Old Sun looked round at them all and said: "If everyone has had his say, I'll say what I think, and you decide whether it's any good or not. If it's no good, we'll just forget about it. Regarding the Yang brothers,

we all feel angry because they have forgotten that they are Chinese. However they grew up in Japan, went to school in Japan, and Japanese books poisoned their minds. They despise us, and that is wrong of them, but if we think back a little, it is also the fault of the Japs. The Japs spoiled them! Another thing, they are both workers, and can make a contribution to our new society, so we ought to treat them more leniently. Send them away, No good, who would come and repair the machines? Repairing machines is not like chopping firewood or cleaning a pan. If you chop firewood a little bigger or a little smaller it doesn't matter; but in machines a difference of one millimetre will make them stop, and one grain of sand will put them out of action. Another thing, a pan is a dead thing, but machines are living. Machines have tempers and can make trouble. So, we can do whatever we like to them, as they are in our power. Only who will see to the machines? If we don't learn from them how can we repair them?"

When Old Sun had finished speaking there was a general discussion. People who wanted to smoke took this opportunity to get out their cigarette paper and tobacco.

"All right, let them repair the machines, only we're not going to put up with their old way of cursing each time they open their mouths, and scowling at nothing," said Liu Fu loudly for everyone to hear.

Liu Yüeh-hsüan, who as a rule never opened his mouth, now felt that he had to put in a word, and with his eyes on the ground said: "As long as other people have the skill we will always be cursed and shouted at. If we don't want to be cursed and shouted at the only thing is to learn their skill."

Old Sun followed up enthusiastically: "Old Liu has said it; others may not understand, but workers will understand. Those who have no special skill will always be handicapped."

"After the repairs are done we can send them away or do anything to them!" shouted Li Chan-ch'un. But Chu Tzu-chen immediately nudged him and asked, "Yes, we send them away. But if the machines break down again later, what will we do?"

A hubbub ensued with everybody talking at the same time, as they had before. Ch'en Tsu-t'ing felt this was all very futile, and thought to himself: "A discussion like this gets nowhere! How can they come to any good conclusion by shouting and bawling together?" Looking at Old Sun's slow ways he felt thoroughly impatient, and smiled contemptuously to himself: "He looks like a furnace that hasn't been stoked up for three days, no fire or dash. Look at him! He wouldn't mind the discussion dragging on for ten days. If I were in his place I would just go and consult Director Wang. What's the use of group discussion?"

Now Wu Hsiang-t'ai forgot the pain in his feet again. Pushing everyone aside he made his way to the front and asked them all to be quieter. Then squaring his shoulders he said loudly: "I'm going to give my opinion too. The Yang brothers should be kept to repair the machines, but only on one condition: while they are repairing we shall be watching, so by the time they have finished we shall understand how to do it; and in this way we can see whether they are sincere or not. If they do well, we will lessen their penalty; if not, we shall help them to reform themselves. They're also our fellow countrymen and so have a share in the plant. They must make an effort. This will also be a way to test them."

Before Wu Hsiang-t'ai had finished speaking a burst of clapping from the men expressed their approval. Various people called out together: "Right." "That's a good plan." "Good old Wu!" "This time we've got them fixed!" Liu Yüeh-hsüan was overjoyed at this, and hastily found a chair for Wu Hsiang-t'ai and begged him to sit down. When everybody was a little quieter Old Sun spoke again:

"Old Wu's quite right. This way we can keep them under control and at the same time learn their skill. If we workers want to be masters, we must make a thorough job of it. If workers don't know how to control machines, how can they be real masters?"

Everybody responded cheerfully to Old Sun: "Right you are." "Well, let's be real masters then." Some said softly and sceptically, "But will they be willing?" Others answered: "If they aren't, won't they be afraid of us?"

"I'd like to add something to Old Wu's suggestion," went on Old Sun. "Which is better — for them to do the repairs while we watch; or for them just to explain what to do and let us do it? Why? If they do the job, and we just watch, it's like the old saying — to scratch an itching spot over the boot."

Without waiting for Old Sun to finish Liu Yüeh-hsüan grasped his meaning and raising his head excitedly interrupted: "For another, I know, one knows better after doing than after listening. Once you've fixed a thing, you remember how all your life."

Wu Hsiang-t'ai got up again from his chair, and said clearly: "Old Sun, I second that. Your proposal is superior to mine. Let's do as you say."

The whole group approved Old Sun's proposal by clapping and shouting, and then Old Sun asked their opinions: "Let's think of details, and see if there is any better plan. . . . If you don't have any other suggestions we still have to refer our proposals to the authorities and consult Assistant Director Lü and Director Wang; they are our leaders."

Director Wang agreed to the proposals put forward by the Workers' Union. The next day without

any delay a meeting of all the employees was called, at which all from Director Wang down to the workers were present. This was a thoroughly successful meeting. Not to speak of anything else, the way the Yang brothers hung their heads and came timidly and fearfully to the meeting, and the crescendo of the men's anger, were enough.

In previous meetings the difficulty had been to get the men to speak, but now each tried to get in his word first. The chairman of the meeting certainly had his hands full. The last few days Old Sun had learned a good deal from Director Wang and from the men. "This half month is a match for all the previous forty-eight years," he thought. At night when he considered the progress he was making he could not sleep for happiness. He, like the rest of the men, was beginning to love the authorities. "The Communists really have some able people!" Especially he admired the Communists' courage in correcting their own faults. When he was by himself he turned his thumbs up, saying, "Great, great! Willing to change, they can't go wrong! With that they can stay secure."

But to return to the enthusiasm of the whole group. The general meeting lasted for a whole day, and from beginning to end everybody was in the highest spirits. Even Old Liu, who never opened his mouth, called out, "Manchukuo is finished. Now it's really a democracy! We can never have such a day if Generalissimo Stalin did not send

troops to help us turn the Japs out, if the Communists did not give us the leadership!" Notoriously lazy Tsao Wan-fa and Mao Wei-liang did not go to sleep during the meeting, but listened carefully to what everyone said, and when the rest clapped enthusiastically they clapped too. Mrs. Chang cheerfully headed the other women to boil water and pour out tea. By now eight workmen's families had moved out here. These women were all wearing fairly clean clothes, and came by turns to the hall pouring out tea. Even Chu Tzu-chen's young wife had stopped caring whether she was shy or not, stopped caring whether her husband approved or not, and had come to the meeting to pour out tea. Once Mrs. Chang glancing sidewise out of wide indignant eyes spat vigorously at Yang Fu-t'ien's foot.

The general meeting fixed a date to start repairing the Number One Electric Generator, and suggested a labour competition. In conclusion Director Wang made a speech in which he blamed himself and praised the strength of the workers. He gave special praise to Old Sun; he also laid stress on the importance of skilled workers, saying, "In the old society individuals jealously guarded their technical skill, their chief fear being that people would steal it from them. Because of this such skills could not be perfected. In the new society, technical skill should be given to all, to enlighten us, so that we can build something new

on the foundation. We must try to gain the first place in uninterrupted invention and discovery. If you are conservative, when other people create new techniques you can't keep your first place." Last of all he praised the willingness of the workers' families to wait on the group, and proposed that the women should also join the Workers' Union, forming a small Women's Group, exerting their efforts like the men to generate electricity.

Even as Director Wang was speaking, Old Sun caught first this one of the women and then that, and pulled them in. It really was curious; when nobody asked them in they wanted to come in at all costs; yet now that they were invited they all hung back shyly. When Director Wang asked the opinion of the meeting as to whether a Women's Group was welcome or not, all the men clapped wildly. Only Chu Tzu-chen, stealing glances at his wife, felt displeased.

It was interesting to watch them when they were asked to elect a leader. They started discussing the question together in low voices.

Mrs. Liu pointed to Mrs. Chang and said, "Let's just elect her."

"Good, there's nobody more suitable," agreed someone else.

"Don't refuse, Mrs. Chang, just say you will," said another.

Mrs. Chang feeling very indignant gave Mrs. Liu a couple of slaps and pinched Mrs. Li.

In the end, however, she had to consent, and amid the applause of the meeting, she said: "Look, everybody. How can I take a job like this? If you want someone who can read, Mrs. Li is the one, or somebody more able, there are lots better than me. But they would go and elect a useless person like me." As she spoke she gained confidence and dared raise her head to look at the women. "Women ought to have names. Now that we are also liberated, we ought each to have names of our own. My own family name is T'ang. Why should I be called Chang like him?"

Before she had finished all the men started roaring with laughter. Mrs. Chang grew a little flustered, and turning to Wang Yung-ming asked him: "Director Wang, won't you choose a name for me? Not flowers or grasses or anything like that; give me a more liberated name; and let all the others have new names too. . . ."

"What about the name Hsin Hua (New China)?" said Wang Yung-ming, smiling and standing up cheerfully. "Why? In the past we had the old China, then Manchukuo; but none of them were any good; they all oppressed the people. Now we have the New China, a democracy, the country in which the people are the masters. So if you are called Hsin Hua it will show that you are liberated."

Again there was hearty applause. All the other women asked Director Wang, Assistant Director Lü and Li Hsi-hsien for names.

Only when the sun was setting did the meeting break up.

This time the repairs were carried out quite differently. After breakfast when the bugle sounded, each group leader assembled his group in the machine shed to start work. No one dared lag behind. In the machine shed the Yang brothers led the workmen to examine the machines, explaining the position of each part, its function, what was wrong with it and how it should be mended. Then the men got on the job, dismantling, washing, filing, soldering and fixing on new parts. Whenever anything had been fixed on, everybody had to have a look. To begin with the Yang brothers gave very superficial explanations, but under the workers' fire of questions and discussion they gradually changed their lazy ways.

In the evening there were still classes, but only three times a week. One class was to discuss the progress of everyone's work during the past week, when good and bad alike were discussed in a democratic way. Old Sun, Liu Fu and Ch'en Tsu-t'ing took the Politics class in turn; Li Hsi-hsien gave one Culture class, while Lü Ping-chen, whose conservative outlook had been destroyed by Director Wang, on his own initiative took one Technical class, showing great enthusiasm in studying technique. The Workers' Union requested the Women's Group to attend the Politics class.

Mrs. Chang was an enthusiastic and energetic woman. After she was elected group leader and had heard a good deal of Communist doctrine, she became much more enlightened.

After the general meeting broke up, Chu Tzu-chen scolded his wife because he was displeased with her for going to the meeting to pour out tea and for joining the Women's Group. In the old days she would not dare utter a sound, only shedding tears in silence; but now that there was a Women's Group she was bolder. When her husband scolded her she started crying aloud. Hearing the noise Mrs. Chang and several other wives came to help patching up the quarrel. They also criticised Chu Tzu-chen half in fun and half in earnest until he felt uncomfortable and stole away. In this way Mrs. Chu gained her legal status and attended meetings, like everyone else. She went also to class, learned songs and took part in the work and production.

"What can our Women's Group do? They're busy all day trying to outdo each other; if we don't work, won't we fall behind?" said Mrs. Chang to the other women one day. They thought for some time, discussing the matter volubly at great length, and finally decided every day at noon to send food down to the works for the men, thus saving them one trip up the hill. In addition they undertook to wash and mend for the men without families.

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Chapter VIII

THERE WAS A HEAVY downpour of rain. The roof of the machine shed leaked. Rain pouring in through various big cracks soaked the machines. During the evening class everybody discussed how to overcome this new difficulty.

Ever since the second election in the Workers' Union Tung had had very few chances to shine in public. But now he tried to make a good impression by making a proposal: "The works used to have a great many sheets of galvanised iron, of good quality. But after August 15th they were all carried off by the villagers. If you don't believe it, go down to the village and have a look. The pigstyes and sheep-pens are all reinforced with galvanised iron. If we could get them back there are enough to mend two roofs, let alone one."

"Well then, you go and get them back, old Tung," said Chang Jung-ts'ai, deliberately giving Tung a difficult job.

Ch'en Tsu-t'ing wanted to gain a little credit and also thought he was the only one who could carry out this mission successfully, since none of the others were willing to offend people. Old Sun was even more hopeless because he was afraid of hurting people's feelings. So he stood up and said: "In that case, let me take care of this business."

Some people clapped to show that they agreed. Ever since the big general meeting, everybody had learned to clap, and for the least thing they would clap to express approval. This was particularly true of the women who felt that clapping was most fashionable.

After Tung had made his proposal he regretted it, because his family had taken more galvanised iron than anyone else. The next day before it was light he went down to the village and told his father to take down the material at once and hide it. "But don't you dare tell anybody else," he ordered. However his father told his younger brother and cousin's families; these two families spread the news in confidence to their friends, and these friends told friends of their own with the result that there were only two families who were not in the know. Ch'en Tsu-t'ing was no fool. He was afraid the news might leak out, so as soon as he had had breakfast he and P'an Yü-shan taking

several lengths of rope went down to the village. As he got there he found one family in the middle of taking down their galvanised iron. Ch'en Tsu-t'ing accordingly went over and said very politely: "My friend, this galvanised iron belongs to our works. We want to take it back to repair the buildings. The country now is not like Manchukuo. The army and the people are one family, and anything that is public property ought to be given up."

The villager replied that he had bought these sheets at Hsi Liang Chen. "Don't be absurd," said Ch'en Tsu-t'ing. "All the galvanised iron in this village is from the power plant. When we don't need it, it doesn't matter if you use it. But now it's needed to repair the buildings." Saying this he told P'an Yü-shan to start tying the iron sheets together. The villager knew that he was in the wrong and had to let them take down all the iron he had. They went from house to house and saw that all the pigstyes, sheep-pens and hen coops had been dismantled. Some had already new wooden boards or maize stalks fixed up, but most of the galvanised iron had been taken down and not replaced again. "This is a fishy business," thought Ch'en. "Why have they taken them all down? Could it be someone passed the word around?" Going further on he found one other household that had not taken down the galvanised iron. Ch'en Tsu-t'ing explained to the villager

what he had come for and wanted to take away his iron, but the man would not let him. He shouted: "Right, these used to belong to the works, but now they belong to me. Why didn't you look after them then? Ma Yü-shan carried off a good deal. Why don't you ask him to give the things back? We admit we took them; but if you take them away, my pigs will be finished." His wife also came out of the house crying, and Ch'en Tsu-t'ing was afraid there would be a scene, so he gave it up as a bad job, and went back with P'an Yü-shan to the works, taking the little galvanised iron he had.

That evening in class Ch'en Tsu-t'ing told the people present what had happened, and everybody wanted to discuss the matter, when Old Sun said: "Leave discussion for the time being and let me go and have a try today; if it's no use we can discuss it together later."

Hearing what Chairman Sun said, the men stopped worrying and went on quietly with their class.

That evening when work was over, Old Sun went down to the village without waiting for his supper. He went straight to Old Liu's house and sat down in the doorway. This Liu was an old inhabitant of Three Surnames Village and had in the past rented the land which belonged to other villages. He had a family of six but no farm animals, so his family was hard up. He was born in the Ch'ing

dynasty, about the same age as Old Sun. When they talked together they often saw eye to eye. The villagers had just finished their evening meal. Seeing that Old Sun had come, they came in twos and threes, each carrying his pipe, to join him.

"They say you have been promoted to be Chairman," said one respectfully.

"Nowadays a Chairman is only a kind of errand boy who has to do what the group says," said Old Sun modestly. "It's not like in the puppet days; this is a democracy."

"No need to remind us, things are different now. In Manchukuo how could you have been elected?" said Old Liu. "Farmers are different from before too. In other villages they are all liquidating landlords and dividing up the land; but the Work Corps doesn't think our little village worth noticing. There are no rich people. Whom could they liquidate? Hah!"

"That's not the way to look at it. The Work Corps is out to help the poor. If they don't come today they may come tomorrow."

"What's that? Old Sun, do you say the Work Corps may come tomorrow?" asked one middle-aged farmer eagerly. But immediately after he sighed and said, "Even if they do come, it's no use; we're all poor people here, no landlords."

"Let me ask you," said Old Sun loudly. "If there are no landlords whose land are you cultivating?"

"It belongs to landlords in other villages; so even if they liquidate them, it won't help us."

"No," said Old Sun, in a voice that carried. "When the landlords over there fall, the land will be divided, and you will have your share. How could they forget people who have had such a hard time of it as you?"

Old Sun's words caused great excitement in the village. More and more people came to listen, and the smoke they puffed out became thicker and thicker. Then Old Sun changed the subject: "How much is bean oil a catty?"

"Don't talk of it, 160 — it's risen again," answered Old Liu.

"How many catties do you need for your lamps each month?"

"How can we afford to light lamps?" said another farmer. "Only those families with small babies who cry and squall in the night have to use lamps. We don't get enough to eat, so how do you suppose we can afford lamps? It's hard."

"In the past how much did you have to spend for electricity?" asked Old Sun, frowning thoughtfully.

"You must have forgotten: the electric lights put in when the Japs were here, were for the wood-mill, not for us," said a woman. "Do you

suppose they would have let us use electricity? Not to say that we couldn't have afforded it anyway."

"In a day or two when we have generated electricity, this village will be able to use electricity. The present People's Government is not like Manchukuo, it wants to help the people. You will be allowed to use it," said Old Sun confidently.

"They say the authorities have ordered repairs to be done again; is that true? And they didn't send a single person to prison, that was very broad-minded. Later on when electricity is generated, we shall all depend on Chairman Sun's saying a good word for us to the authorities so that they'll let us have a little light here," said another woman.

"Mrs. Li, nowadays the authorities really love the people and look after their interests, they will let you use it. The Communists follow the wishes of the masses, so that without anybody named Sun mentioning it they will let you use it." Old Sun accepted the pipe Old Liu offered him, took a puff, and went on, "At present the works are being repaired all right. There's only one thing missing which may hold up repairs."

"What's that?" asked a woman anxiously. The women gathered together chattering excitedly, while the men took the pipes out of their mouths the better to hear his answer.

"There's nothing missing. I can guarantee the machines will be repaired successfully. Only the

roof of the machine shed leaks and needs repairing. Supposing it isn't repaired? Even if the machines are repaired, they may be spoiled by the damp. If we could cover the roof with a layer of galvanised iron there would be no danger of leakage." After saying this in his slow deliberate way, Old Sun took another puff at his pipe.

"That's easy, I've got some galvanised iron at home, only I'm afraid there wouldn't be enough," said Old Liu enthusiastically, while his wife gave him a disapproving look. His eighteen year old son rushed out and took out six sheets of iron from under the pile of rice stalks, which he brought straight to Old Sun. And he said, "There are two more inside."

Old Liu stood up, stuck his pipe in his belt, looked at the galvanised iron, and said: "Let's all think this over together: These few pieces aren't enough. We must think of a way out." Then he bent down and scraped off some of the dirt on the iron.

"I'll bring what I've got at home," said a man called Li. He was the person who had quarreled with Ch'en Tsu-t'ing that morning, not allowing him to take down his pigsty. Now he was the first to respond to Old Liu's appeal; and at this a good many households voluntarily brought out what they had. Some of them were reluctant to do so, but they were afraid in future they would be refused electric light, so they had to follow the

majority. Even Tung's father persuaded his wife and son to produce half of theirs.

In less than no time there was a pile of over a hundred galvanised iron sheets at Old Liu's door. Old Sun stood up, frowning thoughtfully and said: "It's really too bad to have taken the roof of your pigstyes. We must—"

"Take them, the machines are more important," said one villager.

"If you say so," said Old Sun, stretching out his long arms and smiling heartily to show his gratitude. "There are some odd pieces of wood up at the works. Since you've given up your iron you could take a few pieces to use instead, to mend the styes. How about that?"

The villagers were delighted, and with no further delay the young ones volunteered to carry the galvanised iron for Old Sun back to the works.

Old Sun was late to class. He had the galvanised iron set down properly, saw off the villagers who were overjoyed to be taking home wooden planks, and then wandered to the kitchen to eat a little cold rice. It was not till he had finished that he discovered someone had kept a big bowl of vegetables for him; but by then he had had enough. He wiped his mouth and went to class.

That night when Old Sun made his report Director Wang questioned him minutely about the whole business. The more Wang heard the more impressed he was; after this he discussed with Old

Sun again how the latter had deceived the officials, and how he had taken the initiative in the group to break the ice and salvage the oil; and as Old Sun spoke Director Wang nodded repeatedly in approval. "This is to follow the mass line; you have really identified yourself with the masses. You can identify yourself not only with the workers but with the country people too. No wonder, for you were once a farmer yourself! . . ." Director Wang used many different arguments to prove his theory.

Old Sun was a little embarrassed to hear himself praised, but quickly regaining confidence answered, "That's nothing, nothing to speak of. To influence one or two people is very easy; to influence the whole group is difficult. To influence the whole group you must first understand what they are dissatisfied about and what they are hoping for. Then you can do away with their dissatisfaction and tell them that their hopes will be realised, and how they should hope. In this way they will work to the death for you!"

Wang Yung-ming drank in what he said, and thought, "He has formulated his rules from his own experience, while all I know is some dead teaching. No wonder Chairman Mao tells us to learn from workers, farmers and soldiers!" He did not say anything, however, just tightly gripping Old Sun's broad, rough palm. As for Old Sun, he felt Wang Yung-ming understood much more than

he and had better methods, yet was still so humble. He admired him inexpressibly, and thought: "Our Director Wang is every bit as good as that Department Head Li."

Regarding Old Sun's working methods, Wang Yung-ming thought them over carefully again and again: he used resentment to get everyone to break the ice and protect the machines; he used encouragement and the force of example to get them to skim off the oil; he used suggestion and persuasion to get them to unite together and repair the machines; and when he went down to the village he could see what the people needed, and think of a way to overcome their difficulties, with the result that he was able to bring back so much galvanised iron. All these facts Wang Yung-ming felt it would be worth his while to make trial of both now and later in his work. He also used these examples again and again for Ch'en Tsu-t'ing's instruction, and devoted one class at the Workers' Union to urging everyone to study Old Sun's spirit and methods.

This time Wang Yung-ming only stayed ten days at Jade Girdle Lake, but these ten days were very fruitful for him, very valuable. He planned to transfer Ch'en Tsu-t'ing to the Electric Company to work, but both Old Sun and Wu Hsiang-t'ai said that the works could not get on without him, and that they were sure he would gradually overcome his weaknesses. Wang Yung-ming also felt there was much to be said for leaving him at the works

to learn from the men and from Old Sun and Wu, so he abandoned his original plan.

Everything was going ahead at Jade Girdle Lake, and Li Hsi-hsien, although outwardly able to maintain his former quiet and humble pose, was inwardly much upset. The more enthusiastic the others became, the more lonely he was; the more united the others were, the more isolated he felt. The rest were happy from morning to night, worked vigorously and laughed uproariously, but he was exasperated from morning to night and depressed. Besides, he had nothing to do and no way of letting off his feelings; although his uncle Tung and Little Sung had much in common with him, still these days they too were crest-fallen and dispirited. In the past when he went to see Lü Ping-chen the latter always welcomed him in his elegant, leisurely manner; but if he went to see him now, he was always busy over some technical question or else in conference with the Yang brothers.

One evening after supper, feeling thoroughly at a loose end, he went to stroll by the houses, when Mrs. Chang came out to empty water and called out to him: "Mr. Li, you haven't been to see us for a long time. Come in for a while!" Ever since Mrs. Chang had joined the Workers' Union and been made a group leader, and spoken in front of everyone, she felt more than ever that she was the equal of the men. She liked to use "You men. . . . We women" in her conversation. Wherever there

was a group of people she would go over to have a look, and whenever people were discussing a problem she always had to voice her opinion. Li Hsi-hsien accepted Mrs. Chang's invitation and went in. Chang Jung-ts'ai was sitting crosslegged on the kang, rolling a cigarette. His small son who had just learned to walk was eating, holding the chopsticks himself and covering his face with gruel.

"Old Chang, it's a long time since you've been into town."

"You're right, two or three months," said Chang, offering him a cigarette.

"Aren't you bored? People, who are used to an active life, find it hard to be quiet."

"Can't be helped; we have to make the best of it." He puffed at his cigarette. "Luckily things are in good shape now at the works."

"Nothing like in Manchukuo days. In Manchukuo they wouldn't treat a driver so badly. Look at the kind of life you have now. It wouldn't matter if you yourself couldn't afford to eat good rice and white flour, but even your kid can't eat them!"

"We got more money in the puppet regime, that's a fact." Only now had Chang begun to talk of the puppet regime instead of Manchukuo, and while he himself was unconscious of this change, Li was aware of it at once. He went on, "But it was very uncomfortable, and being slapped in the face,

kicked and cursed all the time was enough to put up with! Nowadays we may be poor, but we're all equally poor!"

"Yes, the Communists are using equality to buy people," said Li coldly.

"That's a funny thing to say. From old times the rulers have always used money to buy people, but when did you ever hear of their using equality to buy the people? When did you ever see women standing on the same footing as men and holding meetings together?" Mrs. Chang wiped her hands on her jacket and spoke gravely.

"Of course it's a good thing for women to stand on the same footing as men, but I hear the women also sleep in the same bed with any men they want to," said Li, still speaking coldly and contemptuously.

This last remark of Li's made Chang Jung-ts'ai as angry as if he had been personally insulted. Ever since his wife was elected group leader, in spite of a little jealousy he had on the whole been pleased, thinking it an honour. He said loudly: "Have you seen cases yourself?"

Li Hsi-hsien gave a start. It was not that he was afraid of Chang losing his temper, but he was amazed at how he had changed. In the past Chang loved to talk disparagingly about the Eighth Route Army, but now he was taking their side. Feeling disconcerted Li immediately changed his cold foxy expression for a smile, and said, "I only heard it

last year; how could I have seen cases?" Finding conversation was becoming too difficult, he took his leave and walked out. Outside there were people coming and going, all looking very busy, or else sitting in groups of three or four talking about the machines or discussing problems. In the past when people saw him they would bow or nod politely, or else call out, "Mr. Li, come and have a chat." But now people were so busy that they didn't seem to notice him. He was thoroughly bored all on his own; then it occurred to him that he had not called on Ch'en Tsu-t'ing for a long time, so he went to his house. Ch'en Tsu-t'ing was holding the baby in one arm, and with the other writing something in pencil. As soon as he saw Li, he put the paper away. Li Hsi-hsien pretended not to have noticed, and smiling artificially, said: "Chairman Chen." Then correcting himself at once, he continued, "Oh, Section-Manager Ch'en, you are very peaceful here, carrying the baby and enjoying parental felicity. Where is your good wife? Has she gone to a meeting of the women's group?"

During the last couple of weeks Ch'en Tsu-t'ing had learned a good deal. At first when Director Wang criticised him for keeping all power in his own hands he would not admit it; and he did not appreciate Old Sun. But during the last fortnight the work had really been progressing much better, and everybody was united; added to this Old Sun and Wu Hsiang-t'ai's patience in helping him by

all possible means was gradually overcoming his complacency and jealousy. At first when the Workers' Union had its re-election of officers he was very depressed and resented the organisation. He felt in very low spirits, afraid of being punished. Everyone else was making uninterrupted progress, and such fast progress at that. He felt as if he had been in a battalion marching with the rest, and now was suddenly standing still by himself; while everyone else kept advancing, he had fallen behind, had fallen behind all by himself. After some bitterness, after struggling with wrong ideas, he thought: "They're workmen and so am I. If they can improve, why can't I? Director Wang is always criticising himself, saying he doesn't keep close enough to the people, that he's too bureaucratic. So why should I be afraid of making the same mistake?" After he had analysed himself he felt better. He often heard Wu Hsiang-t'ai saying how good the Party members were and how glorious it was to be a member of the Party, and he thought to himself, "Would it be good or not to join the Party?" He talked it over with his wife, and her view was that he had better wait a year or two and see. He talked it over with Liu Yüeh-hsüan and the latter said, "People who aren't Communists can still run machines." He talked it over with Old Sun and Wu Hsiang-t'ai and they both said it was good and that they wanted to become Communists themselves. "Only I'm afraid they

won't want me," said Old Sun anxiously. Then Ch'en Tsu-t'ing made up his own mind and did not discuss the question again with anyone. He only requested Director Wang that he might join the Party. Director Wang told him to humble himself to learn from everybody, analyse himself, work harder, and in a few days he might write a short autobiography, explaining his background and thought. These last few evenings he was engaged in the difficult task of writing this autobiography. When he took up a pen he felt it was more difficult to use than pliers or hammer. Usually he considered that he knew a great many characters, but as soon as he started writing all those characters turned their backs on him and refused to recognise him. Just now he was describing his thought, and wanted to write, "I have behaved too much like a bureaucrat;" but he could write neither "behaved" nor "bureaucrat," so he was extremely exasperated. When Li Hsi-hsien came in he thought of asking him, but was afraid Li would insist on knowing what it was all about and give away his secret, so he hid the paper and answered in a dispirited way.

Li Hsi-hsien saw that his first remark had failed to upset Ch'en, so he tried again! "Since you resigned from being Chairman, everybody regrets it. This is also the people's strength."

Ch'en started listening seriously and lifted the baby up, thinking, "Here comes another flatterer, but this time I'm not going to be deceived. I made

a big enough fool of myself with old Tung!" But he said, "I ought to take this opportunity to learn from everybody."

"Of course there are some people who approve of Sun as Chairman and say he's good, he's able. But different people have different opinions. It's hard to find a single unprejudiced person."

"What you say is not quite right. Whoever is Chairman has to serve the people, and whoever does this well will be kept in office by the people; this can't be considered as prejudice." Ch'en spoke rather indignantly. He felt this was the only way to do justice to Old Sun, do justice to the Workers' Union, do justice to his own better self; moreover this was the only way to show that his political understanding and sense of fairness were higher than Li Hsi-hsien's.

Li realised that Ch'en Tsu-t'ing's attitude had changed, and he did not pursue the subject; but putting on a serious expression, said, "Your generosity, Manager Ch'en, really makes me admire you. I'm afraid if I tried for a lifetime I could never be like that! . . ."

Ch'en Tsu-t'ing took this opportunity to give Li Hsi-hsien a long lecture, talking on until Li's patience was quite exhausted, and it was only when the baby Ch'en was carrying started making too much noise that Li was able to say good-bye and go. He went back to his room feeling unspeakably bored and ready to fly into a rage.

When Tung saw how pale he looked, he said timidly, "Who's made you angry?" He waited for some time but his nephew did not pay any attention, so he sighed and said, "When there's no meat one has to be contented with vegetables. If you insist on meat, isn't that looking for trouble? Look, can Manchukuo come back? No hope of the Kuomintang Government either! Never mind what government it is. As long as we have food to eat, that's enough."

"What do you know about it?" said Li savagely, lying on the bed with his arms across his face. "I am not the person to decide whether I may have meat or vegetables. What do you know about it? I can't help it."

Neither uncle nor nephew could be troubled to light the lamp: the room was very dark and Li's exhausted tones were gradually swallowed up in the gathering gloom.

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Chapter IX

THE AUXILIARY EXCITER and main exciter of the Number One Generator were not broken, but they had been soaked and needed to be dried; the direct current exciter was not broken either, only in many places the wire of the stator had come out. Now the workmen fastened these places up with mica and tape.

The bend of the shaft of the generator had been spoilt by the ice so that it was now quite out of shape. Liu Yüeh-hsüan, Chang Jung-ts'ai and several others talked it over and decided that the only way to restore its original shape was to straighten it with a press. The screws were rusty and would not turn, and when they used a screwdriver to turn them, the heads of the screws broke off while the rusty bodies were left in the holes. On the face of it, it seemed

an easy business, but to get these nails out taxed the workers' ingenuity. Confronted with difficulties like this there were times when even the engineers were at a loss to know what to do, because problems like these are not dealt with in textbooks.

Many places where two pieces of Babbitt metal met in the water, pressure system were broken and the workmen mended them all. Also the main valve of the water line had been badly damaged by blasting. The engineers and workmen held several meetings to discuss this. Finally the workmen decided to divide into day and night shifts. Making a concentrated effort for six days and nights, they were able to repair the main valve. As for other minor missing parts, they replaced them with what was left from the burnt Number Two Generator.

It took sixteen days to finish repairing the Number One Electric Generator — altogether twenty-four days including drying out. For ten days Liu Yüeh-hsüan and Wu Hsiang-t'ai did not go back to the dormitory or wash their faces, or attend classes. When they were tired out, they went to sleep beside the machines. When they woke up, they started work again. Although it had been agreed that each shift should work for twelve hours, these two worked on the average fifteen or sixteen hours a day. Of the other workmen, all worked at least ten hours, and some for thirteen or fourteen.

By the time the machinery was completely overhauled everyone had lost weight through overwork.

Liu Yüeh-hsüan and Wu Hsiang-t'ai in particular were shockingly pale and thin: Chang Jung-ts'ai compared their eyes to car lights which have lost their glass. But they were still in the highest spirits, as if they would not mind going on for another fortnight or month. Wu Hsiang-t'ai's burns had healed up too in this strenuous activity.

Wang Yung-ming had been away from Jade Girdle Lake for over two weeks. The first time a generator was being repaired he was not in the least anxious because he thought there were the engineers to look after the technical side and Ch'en Tsu-t'ing to stimulate the workers. The second time a generator was being repaired he was again not in the least anxious, but this time it was because he felt he had already handed over the power plant to the workmen. The first time he had a false confidence, but the second time he had learned through bitter experience to place his trust in the whole group.

"Oughtn't you to go to Jade Girdle Lake and see how things are getting on?" Business Manager Li reminded Wang one evening.

"Tomorrow. Probably in a day or two they will be testing out the machines, and I want to be there to see it. They have a telephone connected with the other power station, so that if there is any urgent need they can get in touch with me."

Just as Wang Yung-ming was speaking the electric light suddenly grew dim. Later he received a telephone call from the power station telling him

that Jade Girdle Lake had started generating electricity three hours earlier and that the electricity he was now using was theirs. Wang Yung-ming was so pleased he could scarcely contain himself. He took up the receiver and put it down again, picked up his fountain pen without any intention of writing; put on his cap and overcoat and before he had even fastened the buttons, took them off again. He paced excitedly to and fro in the room, and then happening to look up he caught sight of Chairman Mao's portrait and felt as if he had met a friend, so he stood still, transported with happiness, and said in a voice trembling with emotion: "Chairman Mao, with you, with your principles to guide us, there is nothing we can't do — we can have a good harvest, the army can win brilliant victories, broken electric plants can generate electricity again, people can correct their mistakes. With you, what is broken can be made whole, what is old can be made new; those who are lazy, can become hard-working . . .

Business Manager Li, who was particularly busy poring over accounts from morning to night, said to himself, "Then we should tell them that the pressure should not be too great."

Wang Yung-ming nodded his head absent-mindedly, and hurried back to the telephone. After putting the number through, he said loudly: "Electric Power Station? . . . What's the electric pres-

sure? 5,000? How much load is there? It's not too bright. Is it the fault of the wire?"

That night Wang Yung-ming did not sleep well. The next morning someone came from the electric power station, whom he asked for details. But the visitor could not tell him much. Only in the evening when Ch'en Tsu-t'ing came from Jade Girdle Lake was Wang able to satisfy his curiosity. And Ch'en Tsu-t'ing did not tell the story well because he was still as delirious with delight as on the evening when they generated electricity. He spoke at random without observing a proper order.

"Liu Yüeh-hsüan took the water wheel, old Wu was in charge of the switch board, and Assistant Director Lü still saw to the distributor. Old Sun and I were guards. The Yang brothers stood empty-handed at one side, and Li Chan-ch'un and Chu Tzu-chen watched them and other suspicious people."

Ch'en Tsu-t'ing ran out of breath and Wang was able to get a word in: "Who were the suspicious people?"

Ch'en hung his head in embarrassment and said, "Who else but that Tung? Ever since we started repairs he has acted more suspiciously than anyone else."

"Well, go on," said Wang Yung-ming kindly.

"Before generating the electricity we made a rule that apart from those controlling the machines, anyone who made an unnecessary movement should be tied up. Ah, it's hard to describe. My heart was

thumping so hard you could have heard it for over a mile around; and I was sweating. This was not like the first time: the higher the electric pressure went, the more care was taken. By then nobody even dared breathe! When the test had been carried out successfully, still people did not dare talk out loud. The youngsters were so happy they didn't know what to do. Some of them even rushed outside to turn somersaults. It really was funny. The water and hose pipes that we had in readiness we still haven't dared to take away!"

"Wait a bit, listen to me. Why were they so happy, why were they so much happier than the first time? It must be because they repaired the machines with their own hands, and generated the electricity with their own hands!"

Lü Liu-yi at the side heartily endorsed what he said: "The workers repaired the machines themselves and generated electricity themselves!"

After hearing Ch'en's report, Wang Yung-ming questioned him about many things he had left out, especially with regard to technical problems; then he started pacing up and down the room according to his habit. For about a quarter of an hour he did not say a word. During this time Lü Liu-yi left, because she had some business. But Ch'en Tsu-t'ing was in a frenzy of impatience, knowing that once Director Wang was deep in thought he would not speak. He dared not start talking himself, but he had so much to tell that

three days and three nights would not have been enough.

Finally Director Wang told him to go back and discuss with the Workers' Union the best way to arrange a meeting in five days' time to celebrate the generating of electricity. He also told him that prizes might be distributed at the meeting, and that it was possible that representatives from the headquarters and Garrison Headquarters might attend. At the same time he warned him: "Still, don't tell anybody in advance."

Ch'en Tsu-t'ing drew a little money from the office, then went to the shops and ordered two flags, bought portraits of Chairman Mao and Commander-in-chief Chu, waxed paper of different colours for slogans, paper flowers, melon seeds, nuts and tea cups. . . . All the way back he was thinking how to arrange a colourful meeting, and planning to ask Wu Hsiang-t'ai to give an exhibition of boxing, Li Hsi-hsien and Li Chan-ch'un to tell jokes and the women to sing. . . .

When she heard there was to be a big meeting Mrs. Chang took four other wives into the country to pick cherries, nuts, mushrooms and wild flowers for the occasion. They all wore handkerchiefs on their heads and carried baskets, laughing and chattering all the way they went.

"Now that the machines are going, tomorrow they'll be getting paid. I ought to buy some cloth to make Little Ling a gown," said Mrs. Liu.

"Yes, indeed, his shoes are finished and his white coat looks dreadful, all torn and stained with oil; the smell when he comes back from work is enough to send you crazy," put in Chu Tzu-chen's wife.

"Oho! Look, what a delicate wife you are; the smell of oil upsets you; you shouldn't have married a workman."

"You don't understand, he's too hard-working. In the puppet days who ever heard of skilled workers working all day and night. These last few days he only came home twice. When I told him to take off his clothes to be washed he did not say a word, but went off. I took clean clothes down to him, but he just looked stern and went off again."

"Oh, did he only come home two nights? That was hard on you. If I were you, I would have found a man to keep me company."

Several of the women laughed. Young Mrs. Chu was covered with confusion and dropped her basket to chase them, slapping whomever she caught. All the ground was scattered with fresh flowers.

They followed the narrow motor road toward the lake. But for the sake of shade they sometimes passed through narrow lanes. Wild flowers were growing in great profusion, the tallest higher than their knees; it would soon be autumn, and the leaves were turning a darker green. The sweet wild roses and wild lilies had bloomed long ago, only the white star flowers were left, with late-flowering poppies and wild chrysanthemums of all colours. Ripe mountain

cherries hung in clusters from the trees, the hazel nuts were quite a size but not yet ripe enough to pick. Almost before they realised it they had reached the lake. The lake was over two li across at this point; its broadest reach was in the south where it was ten li across. It was said to be about sixty li long, so that it was a long belt of water and that was how it came to be called Jade Girdle Lake. On the other side of the lake was Mo Ting Mountain. On the mountain was a forest, and in the forest were black bears and leopards.

The Japanese had felled a good many trees there. Even now there were still row after row of trunks wrapped round with thick wire at the edge of the lake. In those days, too, the anti-Japanese guerrilla forces often hid in Mo Ting Mountain and killed the Japanese foremen who were cutting the timber in the forest. The Chinese workmen hiding at the back of the forest would watch, and, when they saw the Japanese were dead, would give the dry rations they had brought with them to the guerrillas. Then they would go back. The women had heard many stories like this, but now even though they were sitting beside the lake looking at the mountain they had forgotten these stories: or rather their new life and excitement had taken their place.

There was no wind. The sky was azure blue and the sun lit up the deep green, unruffled surface of the lake, making it look like a smooth mirror reflecting the light. While the sun rays were fier-

cest the surface of the lake looked white and dazzling; but usually it was a deep tender green, like thick glass. On starlight nights, when there was a breeze, many twinkling stars danced along the black length of Jade Girdle Lake, rivalling the beauty of the Milky Way. Ah, it was more enchanting than the Milky Way. When there was a light rain Jade Girdle Lake was bewitchingly beautiful, a sheet of silver grey like a handsome half-awakened woman, or like a child in tears — so pure, so lovable. And that magnificent silver grey led people to understand how to exert their strength to overcome difficulties, to seek for the true light. Jade Girdle Lake had its angry mood too. When a gale was blowing its waves rose twenty or thirty feet high, and the roar of the wind was hurled from the crest of wave to wave.

The women took off their shoes and sat down in a row on a broken wooden boat moored at the edge of the lake, dipping their feet in the water. Mrs. Liu started talking about fish, while young Mrs. Chu simply gazed at the mirror-bright surface of the lake. She remembered how five years before she had seen a length of the softest green silk at a relative's house, and how she had longed to have such a piece of material herself, but she never had. However, that silk was not as soft as the lake water, nor as pretty. She also recalled seeing a big mirror in the landlord's house in which she had seen her own lovely reflection. Jade Girdle Lake was a much

larger mirror, though. "It would be nice if I could stand on the lake and see myself," she thought.

Far off on the other side of the lake a small black speck appeared which grew larger and larger, approaching the centre of the lake like an ant crawling on a glass pane; and before long another small black speck appeared behind it.

"Ah, that's Old Chin and his son's fishing boats," said Mrs. Li decidedly.

"Our Workers' Union has ordered three hundred catties of fish; these are probably ours," said Mrs. Chang, standing up to look into the distance. But apart from two fishing boats that looked like two floating shoes moving in their direction, nothing else could be seen.

"The meeting isn't for another three days. Won't the fish go bad?" asked Mrs. Chu.

"If they're put beside the ventilation shaft, in front of the water wheel, they wouldn't go bad in two weeks, let alone three days."

"Three days? Then we'll have to get busy tomorrow; there'll be over a hundred people to feed."

Mrs. Chu suggested going to have a look at the waterfall. Accordingly they crossed a hill and several small woods and came to the waterfall. The water came from the lake and, reaching a narrow gorge here where the ground suddenly fell away, it poured down to form a big oblong pool at the bottom. At the further end of the pool was a ditch. When the lake water came to the gorge, it followed the

contour of the land and suddenly slipped down to form a waterfall; the oblong pool was very deep, so that after the waterfall reached the pool the water flowed very quietly along by the ditch into the river. The waterfall was over one hundred feet wide and seventy or eighty feet high, and sounded like the thunder of ten thousand horses' hooves, like charging cavalry, like slogans shouted by a hundred thousand men on parade. It threw up countless bubbles of foam which flew some twenty or thirty feet away. Its force and brightness as it poured through the gorge made people dizzy if they looked at it long. It was like the dazzling white clouds of the South that fly forward reflecting the light in summer, making people who like watching them feel oppressed. The women sat close together in a group on the edge. Each time Mrs. Chu came to the lake side she always wanted to see the waterfall, but each time she saw it she was afraid and said to herself, "How nice if he were here and I could hold on to his arm." Mrs. Chang was bolder; but when she saw that angry, fearful looking waterfall, and looked down to the peaceful pool which was said to be one hundred and fifty feet deep, she immediately thought how afraid her baby would be, and would say to herself complacently, "What a good thing I didn't bring the baby."

This magnificent natural scene made people forget the foolish frivolities and cares of the human heart. It filled them with awe, and at the same time

inspired their minds with the ambition to surpass and conquer nature. While the women watched the waterfall each was preoccupied with her own affairs, and each derived comfort and satisfaction from this foaming cataract, which seemed like some mammoth spinning loom.

Imagination often points the way forward and increases one's courage. Like everyone else, they were all willing to struggle for their dreams. But they were fairly realistic and took the present as a foundation upon which to build an imaginary future. Although for the time being they forgot petty trifles they still remembered that they were to gather flowers and fruit and see how many catties of fish Old Chin had caught; they also remembered the children at home who might be crying or quarreling. . . . After thinking for a time, as if by tacit consent they decided to start back.

"Let's go; Old Chin's boat is coming to the shore," said Mrs. Li, and the whole group started toward the lake.

By the time they reached the lake the boat was already moored by the shore, and the women hurried aboard, all asking questions together. Old Chin took off his girdle to wipe his sweat, sat down on the broken boat, and twisting his silver-grey moustache, answered slowly and deliberately: "There are different kinds. There are four or five zig-zag over ten catties each. I haven't caught so many big fish for

years; it must be thanks to the Communists coming into power."

"You are so good-hearted as to catch big fish for them," said Mrs. Liu.

"No, I've been catching fish here for fifty-seven years. 'I fished in the Ch'ing dynasty, I fished in the Republic, I fished in Manchukuo, I'm still fishing under the Eighth Route. I'm not prejudiced in favour of any of them, only those who are lucky, get to eat big fish," said Old Chin loftily, looking up at the sky.

"We've a Three Dynasties Timeserver at the works; but you must be a Four Dynasties Elder."

"You girls are getting on well. You've seen more than I have, all kinds of things! But you don't understand the roar of the wind; you don't see the lake smiling or crying. . . ."

"The lake's a lake. How can it laugh or cry?" asked Mrs. Chu giggling.

After seventy-year-old Chin had joked with the women for some time he gave them a warning: "There's going to be rain; take a look at that cloud up there. If you walk fast you'll be home in time, but if you walk slowly you will be in for a shower."

The women had enjoyed themselves long enough beside the lake, so now they started home. Mrs. Chang felt the cloud was a very small one and it couldn't rain heavily, while if there were any wind it wouldn't rain at all; so she proposed collecting some more things on the way home. They divided

their labour, and Mrs. Chang was told to gather mushrooms, so she went off searching by herself in the grass. To begin with she could still hear the sound of their laughter behind her, but presently they were out of earshot. When she had filled her basket with mushrooms, she was contentedly preparing to find the others to go home, but just as she was standing up she heard men's voices. She was so frightened she ducked down again behind a clump of filbert trees, scarcely daring to breathe.

"Pardon me! You can ask me to kotow and kneel; but I don't dare do this." Without a doubt it was Tung's voice.

"We are pressed for time and can't wait to make terms with you. By law of our secret organisation you are the twenty-fourth generation, so I am your senior." A middle-aged man was speaking. "Do it if you want to, but even if you don't want to, you will still have to. . . . If you don't, you may be able to get away yourself, but your family won't be able to get away, old and young, the dozen of them will all fall into our hands sooner or later. If you pull it off successfully the Kuomintang government will reward you."

"It's not that I'm disloyal, only I'm a timid man. They would soon catch me, and would get you into trouble." This was Tung's trembling voice again. "You go and ask my nephew, he. . . ."

"Bah, you are you, your nephew is your nephew; he's not in the machine shed," said another. "What

are you afraid of? It's not a case for swords or guns. The whole group will be dead drunk. As soon as you hear a rifle shot you turn that thing. And won't it all be in complete darkness, anyway?"

"But see here, the telephone is already connected, so that even if they can't get in touch with the city, they can get in touch with Hsi Liang Chen, and when they have called for troops, you too —" Tung craftily tried to divert their attention with his questions.

"Don't you worry. Someone else will take care of the telephone."

"That's enough. Don't argue with him," said the middle-aged man again. "See here, Old Tung: If you agree today, well and good. If not you won't be going back. Do you suppose now we've let you into the secret we can let you go? . . . If so, how could we still be fighting with the Eighth Route!"

Then Mrs. Chang heard low voices and the sound of a rifle being cocked, and then a trembling appeal: "I agree. Frankly, you give me no choice. . . . The only alternative is to die : . . die. . . . Look after my poor old father! My poor. . . ."

"Bah, what's all this about dying. You won't die!"

"Remember, after dark at nine o'clock, when you first hear a rifle shot. Look out for yourself. . . . Take this money to be going on with. . . ."

When Mrs. Chang realised the significance of all she had heard she trembled as she stooped in the

grass, but it was more with rage than fear. Half an hour after the scoundrels had gone away, she looked out, and seeing there was no one in sight she picked up the basket of mushrooms, and gritting her teeth to steady her wildly beating heart, ran home as fast as she could. On the road she got caught in a little shower, but she was lucky enough to get home without meeting Tung. The other women asked her why she was so late in getting back. She made up a story to satisfy them, then hid herself in her room, not knowing what to do. Having brought in her baby and put him to sleep, she would now sit in a daze, now lie down wanting to cry, now start up meaning to go and fetch her husband. After thinking for a long time, however, she felt that she must on no account tell her husband, because with his temper he would immediately start fighting with Tung, and then their family of three would be finished, and the works would not be saved either. "This is a matter for the whole group; I ought to tell the whole group and let them question Tung." But again she felt this was unsatisfactory, everybody would be indiscreet, Tung would certainly deny the story, and the works still would not be saved.

"Old Sun is discreet and wise, the group trusts him, and Director Wang thinks highly of him. Suppose I tell him?" She felt she had hit on the right solution. Then she reasoned further with herself, "Why, he's Chairman of the Workers' Union, isn't he? Of course I ought to tell him. I can't be

accused of meddling with other people's business; this is a matter of life and death, and I'm head of the Women's Group. . . ."

She had been wavering in her room for a long time, but now her heart felt lighter as she determined to find Old Sun. But as she went out Mrs. Liu stopped her to ask how many different ways they should cook the pigs that were to be killed the next day. After a few words with her, for appearance's sake, she hurried to the Workers' Union. Sure enough Old Sun was sitting there, but with him were Little Sung, Li Hsi-hsien and Ch'en Tsu-t'ing, all discussing the plans for the celebration. When she went in she said at random: "Oh, isn't Chang here?"

Nobody paid any attention to her. She went out of the club room and walked around a couple of times outside. As she was turning back, she bumped right into Li Hsi-hsien who was coming out; both of them had something on their mind and were in a highly excitable state and walking fast, so they collided with some force. Mrs. Chang cursed to herself, "Careless beast!" but forced herself to smile and say, "You are busy!"

"Yes indeed!" smiled Li Hsi-hsien, forcing himself to reply.

"Hasn't Chang come up yet?" asked Mrs. Chang again, going into the room.

"My good girl, the lamps haven't been lit yet, and are you so tired of waiting? He doesn't quit

work till eight o'clock." Seeing a young woman Old Sun liked to make jokes, and felt younger himself. "Come here. the Women's Group ought to join in the discussion too about the meeting the day after tomorrow; there is plenty for the women to do."

"Don't make fun of me, grandfather: I must go back to find Chang about something; we're busy at home. The meeting? Best that you settle everything. What good suggestions do you expect us women to make?" Feeling upset she frowned, wanted to stay and say more, but bit back the words. She went home again disconsolately and lay down beside her baby. After a long time she heard footsteps outside.

"What are you so anxious for old Chang to get home and do? If there's anything to be done, let me do it instead. It'll be all the same. Do you want firewood cut or water carried?"

Hearing someone speak she sat up, and saw Old Sun's tall form standing in her small low room.

"Oh, it's nothing. How dare I trouble you to chop firewood or carry water? It's just that. No, I wasn't looking for Chang, I wanted to ask you something. I had a dream — I suppose it was a dream."

"You're looking upset, what is the matter really? I came just to see you. Could it be you heard someone spreading rumours again?"

When Old Sun spoke, his voice sounded as kindly and sincere as a father's, so that no one could

help trusting him at once. Mrs. Chang felt there was no need to hide anything, so she told him in detail all that she had overheard when she went to gather mushrooms, and in conclusion told him about the conflict in her feelings, her distress and all she had thought. Reflecting deeply, Old Sun nodded his head repeatedly, nodding thirty or forty times altogether without saying a word. Mrs. Chang looked at him, and seeing that he was not speaking began to feel doubtful again: "Could I really have dreamed it!"

"You really are a good woman, you really are a good girl! You are truly a good worker's wife." Old Sun put out a hand to drive away flies from the baby who was fast asleep, and went on: "This will have to be reported to Director Wang; I've had no experience of such matters, I don't know the best thing to do." At first he thought of going into town by himself, but then he reflected that if he left Mrs. Chang behind she might not be able to hold her tongue but let the news leak out, or else she might let Li Hsi-hsien and Tung see her suspicion. That would ruin everything. Accordingly he decided to take her with him. However, he was afraid of wounding her self-esteem, so he did not dare tell her his real reasons. He approached the question from another angle: "Director Wang is such a stickler for details, and I'm so bad at explaining things. When he asks me about this and that I'm sure I shan't be able to give him an exact answer. It would be best

if you would go yourself, then you can explain everything in person quite clearly; and I'll come along with you. What do you think?" He deliberately allowed Mrs. Chang a moment to think it over, then fearing she was still undecided he persuaded her further: "You can make up a story saying the baby is seriously ill and you are taking the opportunity of my trip to town to ask me to take you in to find a doctor. We can go before supper without even telling your husband. What do you say? This business will certainly do you credit."

Listening to him Mrs. Chang was so filled with admiration that for a moment she could not find words to express herself, but tugged at the Workers' Union Chairman's sleeve. After some time she said incoherently: "Our works is like a ship, the men and women, old and young here are like the passengers on the ship, and you are the good captain. With you as our old captain we needn't be afraid of storms or waves! With you. . . ."

Clenching her teeth Mrs. Chang fiercely pinched her baby who was sleeping so peacefully, and the child immediately started howling for all it was worth. Old Sun took this chance to say the baby must have stomach ache, and heated some water for Mrs. Chang, looking for medicine and giving the alarm to all the women around. The child had not slept enough. Now seeing all these people, it cried even more loudly. Everybody bustled about until Old Sun shouted that it was time for him to be

going into town; whereupon someone suggested to Mrs. Chang that she go with Old Sun to town and see a doctor. Mrs. Chang deliberately hesitated for a moment, and then agreed. Half an hour later they had left Jade Girdle Lake and were taking the evening train to Hsi Liang Chen.

When Director Wang had heard the whole story, he did not look in the least surprised, but nodded his head unusually calmly, so that Old Sun was surprised and said to himself, "He must have known all along!"

Director Wang approved of Mrs. Chang staying at the office and particularly requested his wife to look after her and the baby carefully. After a good talk with Old Sun he went late at night to the local committee of the Party, to take the matter up with the Garrison Headquarters. There was no sleep for him that night. The next day he had another discussion with Old Sun, telling him to go and get everything ready at the works, and advising him about all the things he should be on his guard against.

From Director Wang's patient discussion Old Sun had gained a deeper and clearer understanding of classes and the Party, and understood how two opposing classes must fight to the bitter end; and learned many methods of safeguarding the work. Once again he earnestly repeated to Director Wang his request that he might join the Communist Party.

The big meeting was held as scheduled. In the afternoon Director Wang escorted Commissioner Ho

and Commander Wu, Chief of Staff from the Garrison Headquarters, to Jade Girdle Lake. Lü Liu-yi also made her first visit here, and with her came Mrs. Chang and her baby. Mrs. Chang had learned many valuable new ideas from Lü Liu-yi; for the last three days she had felt as bewildered as a soldier first going into battle, nervousness, excitement, fear and anxiety all mingling in her heart. "Am I even half up to the Eighth Route?" she sometimes wondered.

Thanks to the efforts of Ch'en Tsu-t'ing and the other youngsters the old broken-down low assembly hall was really excellently arranged, with paper flowers and slogans of all colours making the room look fresh and bright. On a scroll presented by the local committee of the Party was written: "Build up the people's electric network, develop the people's electric industry." On the Garrison Headquarters' yellow silk scrolls was written in black characters: "Win the war, increase production to help the front line; build up a network to guarantee electricity supply to strengthen the rear." "Workers are the creators of world culture. Only the People's Government led by the proletariat can uphold the workers' authority and develop productive power and creative power." This was the gift from the political headquarters; there were also congratulatory scrolls from the city, district, electric company, power stations, metal works and wood mill.

In the leaders' speeches they all pointed out that all accomplishment and achievement depended on the workers; and singled out for praise Old Sun's courage in using his wits to save the machines, his integrity and achievement, and the workmen's praiseworthy action in spontaneously protecting the machines — breaking the ice and salvaging the oil. In the meeting Director Wang also criticised himself for not following the mass line in his past work, with resultant losses to the cause. Before he had finished speaking Li Chan-ch'un sprang to his feet and burst out: "Chairman Sun, I've got something to say. What Director Wang says isn't right; how can he take the blame for everything? We workers were to blame too; at that time we hadn't woken up to things, we weren't democratic, we didn't say what we felt, only spreading rumours in secret. We didn't follow the democratic way!" He was terrified other people might stop him, so he hastily tumbled one word out after another: "Under the Japs, any credit went to the officials, any mistakes were ours; in a democracy all the mistakes are the superiors', all the credit is ours. This isn't fair either. If not for Director Wang how could anything have been done here? Another thing, he fell ill through overwork, yet even when he was delirious he was still worrying about us here — this is to his credit."

Li Chan-ch'un wanted to go on, but the words were taken out of his mouth by Ch'en Tsu-t'ing, who said excitedly: "It's I who should be held respon-

sible for all the mistakes. I was bureaucratic, I was autocratic, keeping everything in my own hands, not listening to advice from others. I had the decadent Manchukuo mentality. . . ."

All the workmen wanted to speak at once and Chairman Sun had some difficulty in calling them to order to allow Director Wang to continue. When those in charge and the guests of honour had spoken, the workmen spoke. Then Assistant Director Lü distributed prizes. These were divided into three classes: third class prizes were given to all the workmen: a white cloth garment, a towel, a tooth brush and two cakes of soap; the second prize included an additional \$2,000.00; the first prize included an additional \$5,000.00. The members of the Women's Group who had assisted in sending food to the men, washing, cleaning and the rest, also received a white garment each as a prize. The last part of the program consisted of jokes made up by the workers themselves and similar entertainment. In order to avert suspicion, Li Hsi-hsien also went up to the platform and sang too. At nightfall four 400 watt bulbs lit up the assembly hall very clearly. The hall was filled with tables and there were tables in the courtyard outside too. These tables were covered with about a dozen fish and meat dishes, so that there was no room for wine cups. Two casks of wine were set in the corners, giving the good drinkers a terrible thirst just to look at them. Just before nine o'clock the feast was ready,

but the casks of wine had not been opened, Chang Jung-ts'ai felt he could not wait any longer. He got as far away from his wife as possible, because she had given him strict orders not to touch a drop of wine that evening. "If we don't drink tonight, do we drink again tomorrow?" He was grumbling like this to himself when he learned that Director Wang had given an order: until he gave the signal no one was to touch the wine. Hearing this he stood there dejectedly, licking his lips, and began feeling sullen again: "What sort of democracy is this? Such a rule about drinking isn't democratic!" He was feeling in a thoroughly bad temper. When he saw Li Hsihsien at his side with his face ghastly pale, looking anxious and ill at ease, he thought: "He's probably dying for a drink too." Just as he was thinking he heard someone call Director Wang to go to the telephone. After about five minutes Director Wang came back. As he walked in he was shouting, the veins on his hands and on his forehead standing out, and his eyes wide. Passing by Chief of Staff Wu and Commissioner Ho he greeted them and said in a low voice, "It's all up now. The whole lot's caught, not a single one got away. . . ." Then he called out to everyone: "Come on, serve the wine."

When everyone had a cup of wine, Director Wang stood up to make a speech, while two guards dragged Tung up to the front of the hall. Everyone was startled, and people in the courtyard crowded round the assembly hall, holding their breath to hear what

it was all about. Director Wang said: "Fellow workers, our meeting to celebrate generating electricity can finally be considered to be progressing triumphantly and happily in peace. The scoundrels who wanted to sabotage the people's electric industry have all been captured by the People's United Army about three miles away." His speech was interrupted by a sudden burst of thunderous applause. "The traitor in our own camp has also been caught. Because three hours ago a great many armed comrades surrounded this plant. . . . With the Communists, with the People's Government, with the People's United Army, with the workers united, we need fear nothing. Even if he had three heads and six arms our enemy would be shattered. Let's drink a cup to this." Then he gave the lead raising his glass; it described an arc in the air, and in one gulp he had drained the wine.

The Kuomintang had sent their bandit soldiers to come to the electric plant on the evening of the celebration to make trouble, destroy the machines and kill the cadres; their agent in the works, Li Hsi-hsien, was to work from the inside, and Little Sung and Tung were to be utilised. But the Communists in strict secrecy had earlier prepared defensive measures, and an hour and a half before the business arrested all the enemy. After Director Wang's announcement astonishment, delight, gratitude, pleasure, faith in their leaders, these and many other mixed emotions followed each other in the men's hearts, so that they were deeply moved. After

a brief silence they clapped wildly, some shouted for happiness, some knocked their wine glasses so that they tinkled, some without knowing it shed tears of joy. Ch'en Tsu-t'ing hid himself for shame, fear, chagrin and remorse gnawing at his heart. But then another thought occurred to him to stimulate him; he began thinking that Li Hsi-hsien must be involved in this and wanted to suggest this to Director Wang; but since Li was nowhere to be seen he decided to go and look for him. He went out of the assembly hall.

Tung was kneeling in a ridiculous manner at Director Wang's feet kotowing continuously, wailing and sobbing incoherently. Mrs. Chang, trembling with rage, gave the baby on her lap to someone else to hold, and suddenly walked forward, grasped the criminal's collar with one hand so that he had to raise his head, and then cursed him to his face. "We didn't wrong you, yet you promised the Kuomintang to destroy the machines, to collaborate with them from inside. You are a workman too, but you haven't a drop of proper worker's blood in you? Your father and brother are farmers. How could they produce a rabbit like you!"

After allowing Mrs. Chang to relieve her feelings by cursing Tung, Director Wang ordered him to be taken away. Everybody ate and drank merrily, and while the two casks of wine were being emptied, the head of the guards and Ch'en Tsu-t'ing came to report that Li Hsi-hsien and Little Sung had been

taken, and to ask whether they should be brought in. Director Wang shook his head and ordered them to be locked up separately, but to take special care in guarding Li Hsi-hsien. Then he and Commander Wu and Commissioner Ho left the group of happy drinking people and went to question the prisoners. The workers celebrated all night, while some of the leaders and the heads of the Workers' Union were busy all night.

After this incident the workers' vigilance increased. They improved their organisation and established a system for making reports. The next day Liu Yüeh-hsüan said to Ch'en Tsu-t'ing: "Old Ch'en, you were right after all. It's no use simply giving all one's attention to the machines and paying no attention to politics. Look, this time if we'd had no politics, it would have been the end of our works. The Kuomintang bandits would have destroyed it; they wouldn't even have spared the men, let alone the machines!"

But Ch'en Tsu-t'ing answered shamefacedly, "It wasn't I who was right. I was wrong all along the line. Apart from my determination to go with the Communists which wasn't wrong, all the rest was wrong. Look, I had no technical skill, no political education, my methods were bad. I took bad people to be good! I'm an empty barrel. When filled with wine it is fragrant, but emptied what is left? Only Chairman Sun, Wu and Mrs. Chang can be considered

as understanding politics. I'm not even up to a woman!"

One day Chang Jung-ts'ai holding his little son said to him, "Your mother is a real Chinese heroine!"

Mrs. Chang hearing this glanced sidewise at him, and said, "Do you still say I can only puff and shout?"

Chang laughed awkwardly and said, "You, you can puff, you can shout, but you can also catch thieves. Frankly speaking, I used to be afraid of you, but now I respect you."

Mrs. Chang laughed too, and said, "In the beginning I didn't dare believe women could ever amount to anything. Ah, only the Communists are so good to women. They have really liberated us, taught us to do a proper job of work. . . . Secretary Lü is truly good; she's brave if you like, and very experienced. . . . If not for Little Yuan I'd want to join. . . ."

After the celebration Old Sun and Wu Hsiang-t'ai took their prizes of \$5,000.00 and presented them to the Workers' Union for welfare work, and set up as an experiment a very small cooperative. Wu Hsiang-t'ai also presented to the factory his own voltmeter, two rolls of tape, one large switch, three small switches and over thirty metres of pure copper wire. In the Workers' Union he appealed to the others, saying, "I've no use for these things, and if I were to keep them it would be a pity. Under the

Japs, if you'd told me to give them four ounces of dung, I wouldn't. Why? Because dung can be used to fertilise the soil. Now that the factory belongs to the workers, why should I keep these things to myself?"

Immediately Liu Yüeh-hsüan produced his own single phase two horse power electric roller and a small electric pulley. In a short time a good many people had presented machines and gadgets, and Chu Tzu-chen was happy to bring out his 1500 watt electric stove. When Old Tung in the village heard that every one in the works was giving things he and his elder son, younger son and grandson carried up the hill the things Tung had formerly stolen from time to time and taken home: transforming oil, simple alloy, Babbit metal, one welding machine and various other items amounting to two loads in all. He found Old Sun and started crying: "There's nothing I can say; these things belonged to the works and now I'm returning them; it's only fair! Formerly when farmers saw machines, it was like a rat attacking a tortoise, they didn't know where to bite — absolutely helpless. My son's bad habits grew out of greed and fear. Because he was greedy he kept doing dishonest things; and because he was a coward he feared death, feared guns, feared other people would make money, feared other people would be powerful. . . ." With his big rough hand Old Tung wiped the tears on his wrinkled face, making a great effort to control himself. "He deserves to die for

what he did. There's nothing, nothing I can say. "It's all my fault for not teaching my son properly, allowing him ever since he was small to loaf about in town by himself! If you think there is any hope of his reforming, and the government is merciful, I beg Chairman Sun to put in a word for him."

Old Sun comforted Old Tung, who was seventy-seven and still working on the land, and escorted him back to the village. He also took this opportunity to hold a meeting with the villagers, explaining that the village and the power plant were like one family and that if anything happened to one of them the other would suffer. He urged them to be on their guard and not let bad people hide there. Then he praised Old Tung's conduct in returning the things; and urged them all, if they had concealed anything belonging to the works, to bring it back to exchange for electric wire and bulbs, so that the village could soon have light. At once he was able to take back a dozen pails of transforming oil and a good deal of electric wiring and miscellaneous equipment.

A month later every family in Three Surnames Village had electric light.

Chapter X

IN MARCH, 1947, when the political headquarters held a big conference for labour heroes in industrial circles, the hydro-electric plant was allotted three heroes — and these were Old Sun, Liu Yüeh-hsüan and Wu Hsiang-t'ai.

In February the hydro-electric plant held a preliminary election, and seven good workers were elected, namely Old Sun, Wu Hsiang-t'ai, Liu Yüeh-hsüan, Mrs. Chang, Lü Ping-chen, Chu Tzu-chen and Li Chan ch'un. Mrs. Chang's achievement was discovering the spies' plot; Lü Ping-chen was a very hard worker, had directed the men skilfully, and had also repaired the hydraulic meter and welding machine; Chu Tzu-chen had invented a way of changing a filter within two minutes and forty seconds, and had thought out an economical

method of filtering; Li Chan-ch'un with no wish to spare himself had headed workers to repair the wood mill. All these had a great deal to their credit; but when they were compared with heroes from the whole Lu Ming River district, only Old Sun, Liu Yüeh-hsüan and Wu Hsiang-t'ai were left. Old Sun and Liu Yüeh-hsüan were Heroes with Honours, while Wu Hsiang-t'ai was a First Class Hero.

Everybody knew Old Sun's good points: he was good at uniting the men and directing the strength of the whole group; he had saved the machines and led the way and inspired the rest to protect the works, preserving and recovering old materials; he was also good at promoting unity between the leaders and the masses. Regarding Wu Hsiang-t'ai, everybody agreed that his good points were willingness to bear the brunt of any difficult task, sacrificing himself for the common good, and skilled in helping others to improve. As for Liu Yüeh-hsüan he had a fine record in discovery and invention; in studying substitutes that could be used. The valve chamber, for example, originally used turbine oil, but turbine oil was extremely scarce and very expensive; so he experimented with Mobile oil instead, first trying out how good a lubricant it was, then the pressure, and the results were excellent. In this way the works was able to save money and material. He had also headed three or four other workmen to repair the

small water wheel, so that if ever there were any trouble with the electric machine and there was no help from outside, they could use the small water wheel to generate electricity. Another time the protection ring and outer bend of the commutator fused, and the electricity was stopped. All the engineers shook their head, and though Lü Pingchen looked up many books he could find no reason for this. Liu Yüeh-hsüan racked his brains for two days and two nights, and after a minute examination decided that this had happened because the mechanism had rusted, friction had made it hot, and it had expanded and then fused. He headed the rest to cut it with gas, then some parts were soldered, some parts straightened, and after the electric supply had been stopped for eighteen days it was once more in good order. After this repairing all the workmen's skill had improved. In addition he had also prepared resistance wire and increased the voltage of electricity for the town. From the power plant to Lu Ming River a considerable amount of electricity was lost along the road, so that the lights in town were dim. If the voltage were to be increased more bulbs would be spoilt in the works every day. He experimented on the returning line in the factory, covering it with three coils of Number Eight wiring, 500 metres long and 4 millimetres thick, and as the resistance was thus increased on the factory line,

the voltage for the city could be safely increased. The experiment was entirely successful.

After the three labour heroes, Old Sun, Liu Yüeh-hsüan and Wu Hsiang-t'ai, had gone into town to receive their prizes, they went to visit schools, hospitals and other institutions. The hospital they visited was the one where Wu Hsiang-t'ai had stayed. While they were looking at the wards Wu pressed the electric light switch, looked at the light and said with a smile to Liu Yüeh-hsüan, "Much brighter than when I was here."

The head nurse took up the subject: "Much brighter than before; it used to look like a red thread."

Wu Hsiang-t'ai introduced Liu Yüeh-hsüan to the nurse, saying, "It was because he fixed up the resistance wiring at the hydro-electric works, that the lights in town have become bright."

The head nurse and others, who heard, all looked with great admiration at this young hero.

They went on to inspect the iron works, the uniform factory and the bullet factory. A section chief in the bullet factory explained to them the different stages of production and the number of bullets and shells produced every minute. Old Sun listened and thought how each bullet would pierce an enemy of the people, an enemy of the liberated areas. "It's only because they are able to kill so many of the enemy," he said to himself, "that we are able to do constructive work in the

rear, dividing up land and property, studying peacefully and trading freely." He became so pleased he clutched at Liu Yüeh-hsüan with one hand and pulled at Wu Hsiang-t'ai with the other, excitedly saying to them, "We mustn't let the electricity stop one single minute. Don't you see, if it stops for one single minute they will make so many less bullets!"

Director Wang who was behind them heard this, and stepping forward he added, "If you let the electricity stop for one minute the loss to this district amounts to over a million dollars! If you work even harder, and improve the electric industry even more, then we can produce a good deal more of goods!"

When the three men heard this the blood started racing in their veins, their hearts beat rapidly, they felt the greatness of their responsibility and each one swore to himself, "I guarantee there will be no trouble." But not one of them said a word.

In the evening the political headquarters gave them a film-show; one film was a newsreel *The Democratic Northeast, Part II*. The other was a Russian war film. "It will be good if they had put into the film our factory," said Wu Hsiang-t'ai when he was looking at the newsreel. "We can tell Director Wang about it," Old Sun expressed his agreement. As they were talking the electricity suddenly went off. The young on-lookers

showed impatience by whistling, and someone on the stage called out: "Will the comrades from the electric company please come up and repair the lights."

Wu Hsiang-t'ai jumped up and hurried forward to see to the repairs. Liu Yüeh-hsüan closed his eyes and thought of what Old Sun had just told him, that he had already received permission to join the Party; he was very pleased and said gravely and challengingly to himself, "So now I am a Communist!" At the same time he felt sorry for Ch'en Tsu-t'ing: "He's not fit yet; he still has to be tested!" As he was thinking the show started again, and Wu Hsiang-t'ai came back to his seat. Liu asked him: "What was wrong?"

With his eyes on the screen Wu replied absent-mindedly: "Nothing much; the wire was loose, nothing difficult."

The next day an artist came to paint the portraits of the elderly hero of the electric industry. Old Sun, waving his hand, said: "What is there worth painting about my ugly old face! Come on, comrade, you paint a picture according to my idea, or rather a series of pictures. The first shows an electric generator with people looking at it; the second picture shows students studying by electric light, and the third a comrade in some institution working in his office by electricity; another shows the workers in the iron works at their job; still another shows a happy family, father, mother and

children eating under the electric light; and another will be of everybody watching a film; the last will be a switch board and a worker with wide-opened eyes fastened on the metre. That's quite a bit; that's how I want it."

When the artist had finished this series of pictures and showed them to Old Sun, he nodded his head slowly, saying, "Very well painted; only the man looking at the switch board hasn't got his eyes opened wide enough; the wider the better." Then he added smiling, "I can only talk, I can't draw. When my Tiger was in primary school he liked to draw all kinds of things. . . . Thank you, Comrade!"

After another six months there were some changes in the personnel at the hydro-electric works. Lü Ping-chen became Director, and Old Sun was unanimously elected Assistant Director. Wu Hsiang-t'ai was elected Chairman of the Workers' Union, at the same time holding the job of Personnel Section Manager. Liu Yüeh-hsüan remained Electric Section Manager. Ch'en Tsu-t'ing was transferred to the Electric Company, and the company sent someone else out to take over his work in business administration. Chu Tzu-chen's earlier dream was realised: he was now in charge of the oil pump, and had moreover two apprentices. Li Chan-ch'un had been promoted to Materials Section Manager, and was gradually getting over his old slackness and stubbornness. Only in the mornings

when it was time to get up he really did find it difficult to open his eyes, and after supper his indolent ways still made people remember what he had been like before; while if there was a difficult job to be done his old stubbornness would come back and he might go without food or sleep. The workers in the materials handling department unconsciously followed him. In addition to working hard on the job he also worked hard to study culture, and wrote a poem for the Wall Paper:

*I'm called Li Chan-ch'un,
A worker on materials.
The saw drones away,
Sawdust flies all over me.
When the Japs were here,
No one worked well for them;
Under the People's Government
Only bastards are lazy.*

Although Mrs. Chang tended to be narrow-minded and think much of trifles like so many women, she was still able to progress with the others, and now she was elected Organisation Chief of the Workers' Union. This year she got all the women to plant vegetable gardens and keep pigs and hens. Two cars had been repaired and Chang Jung-ts'ai made frequent trips between the town and Jade Girdle Lake.

Jade Girdle Lake had always been a beauty spot, and because of the many heroic deeds of the workmen at the power plant many responsible persons from related offices came there for visits:

Minister Li, Department Chief Wang of the Northeast Board, and Chairman Lin of the Northeast Political Council and other chiefs had all been out here. People from productive organisations outside also made trips of inspection.

One day the head of some office had brought several cadres for a visit. Old Sun was just the same as in the past. He showed the guests round explaining in detail the function of each machine and how it was rehabilitated. After he had finished his explanation a fairly young worker said swiftly. "So the actual moving force is water and oil."

The comrade in charge amended this with a smile: "The important thing is these fine workers!"

Old Sun said in his customary slow, emphatic tones, "If there were no Peoples' Government at the head, it wouldn't do with only workmen!" When everybody heard this they all smiled inwardly.

In May after supper some went to their work, some cultivated the land and some took baths; on the hillside were only the children playing and shouting. Old Sun sat on a trunk on the mountainside, looking down at the transformer station he felt the years slipping off his shoulders. He made calculations; it was exactly a year since they salvaged the oil. During this year there had been not a few changes at the works, and many im-

provements, but there were still several things not up to the mark. As Old Sun saw it, although the big dormitory had been rebuilt, still several of the small dormitories, the assembly hall and the office needed rebuilding. There was no doctor at the works and it was too far to go into town, so that if there were an urgent case of illness it would take too long to send the patient in by car; thus they ought to set up a medical department. There was no teacher at the works, so it was difficult to improve the men's political understanding and general culture. The cooperative ought to be reorganised so that everybody's livelihood could be improved. They ought to open a club, buy some chess-men, musical instruments and such things to let the people enjoy themselves; just to work day and night all the time would never do! And there were other things, such as cleaning and sanitation, the children's schooling, all these needed attending to.

"Not to mention anything else, there's Wu Hsiang-t'ai. We ought to find him a wife. He's not young — thirty-three," thought Old Sun. Then another thought leapt to his mind: "I? — I'm not old, not yet fifty — that's still young!" And really, to be nearly fifty and have no child means that one's cup of happiness cannot be full. Although he had the compensation of happiness arising from working unceasingly for others and the fruit of his labours, there would still be

moments when this gentle, just old man could not help admitting there was a lack. He comforted himself, saying, "No hurry; I can still afford to wait a few years." He stood up, deciding to stroll about, and as he crossed the little bridge the sound of the rushing water in the big conduit sounded in his ears. He listened carefully. Strange! In the past, under the Japanese, he had not felt impressed by the volume of that sound; all these years it had not been enough to drown the hatred and resentment in their hearts; but now, misfortune and resentment had both fled far away. Listen, what force the water has—it sounds as joyful as the young workmen! He stood still and bent down to listen carefully. Now he noticed that in the stream by the transformer station at the foot of the hill a miracle had taken place: the evening sun so big, so red and so round, has cast its bright and beautiful reflection onto the surface of the river ruffled by the evening breeze, casting down twinkling rays like bright, rose red fish scales. This lovely auspicious colour was able to dispel the fatigue of a working day and give the workmen new strength. He watched as if in a dream. Over there, some of the workers were busy with their hoes, the women were carrying basket after basket of green vegetables home from the cultivated land, and the children ran hopping and skipping to meet their parents. Old Sun pointed to the reflection of the evening sun

sinking in the river, and said to the people: "Look, there's a fine sight. What a pity we have no one here who can paint; it would be such a good thing to paint."

Little Ling jumped forward to catch at Old Sun's cuff, and cried, "When I go to school, I'm going to learn to draw pictures, and I'll draw it."

Old Sun patted Little Ling with one hand, stroking his still smooth chin with the other, and said slowly: "By the time you can make pictures, there will be even more beautiful and splendid things in the world, enough for you to paint."

After watching the beautiful sunset for a time, men and women, young and old, went back to their dormitories.

